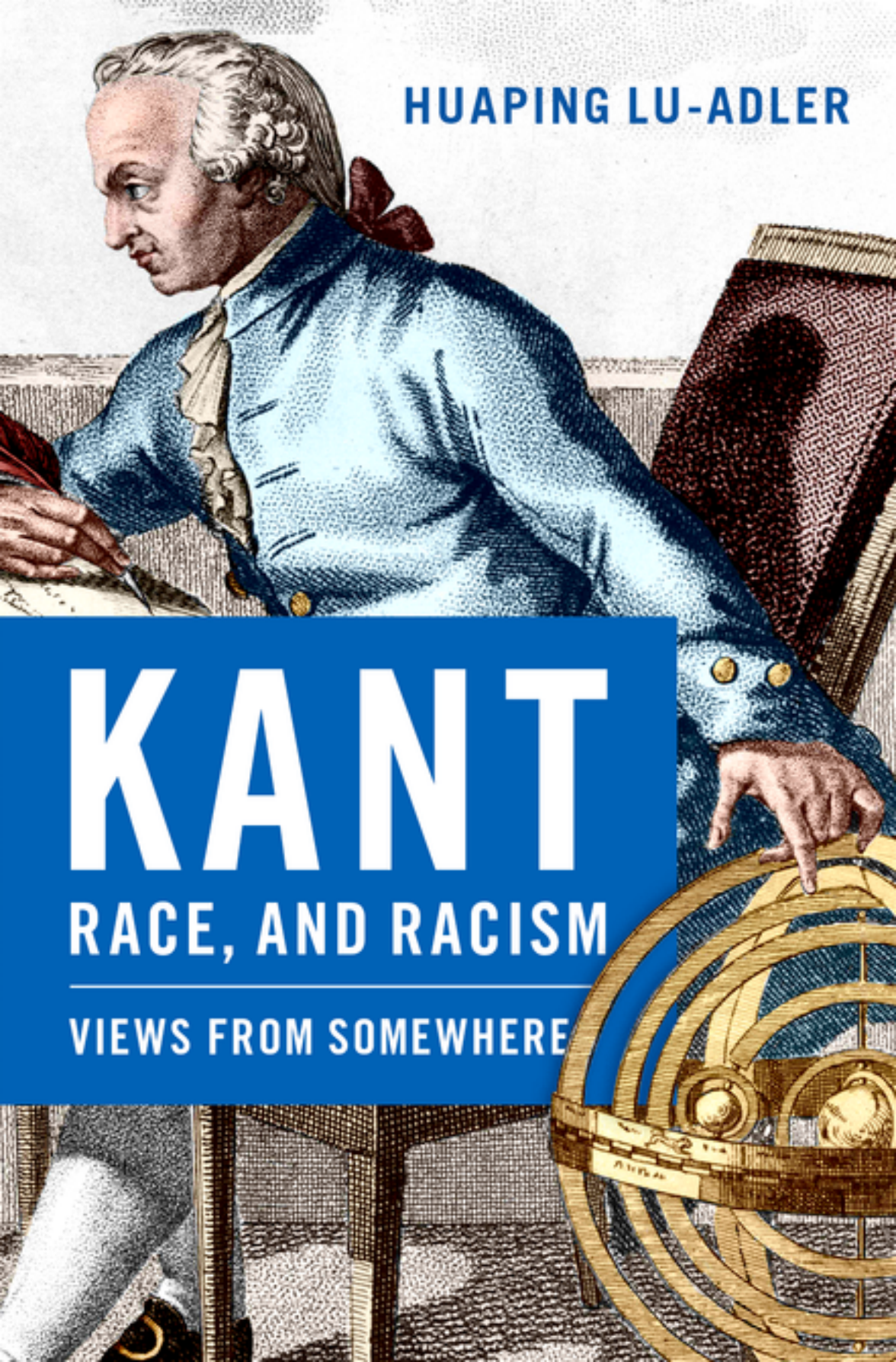
HUAPING LU-ADLER

# KANT
## RACE, AND RACISM
## VIEWS FROM SOMEWHERE



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*To Henry Allison, who believed in me and taught me how to read Kant holistically*

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# Note on Sources and Abbreviations

References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* take the standard A/B form, corresponding to its first (1781) and second (1787) editions. Unless noted otherwise, references to his other works are to the volume and pagination of *Immanuel Kant: Gesammelte Schriften* (AA), Berlin, 1902–. Unless noted otherwise, I use available translations in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Both the abbreviations of the German titles and the English translations used are listed below. Other translations are my own.

| | |
|---|---|
| A/B | Kritik der reinen Vernunft (AA 3–4)<br>*Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. |
| Anth | Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (AA 7)<br>"Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View." Translated by Robert Louden. In *Anthropology, History and Education*, edited by Günter Zöller and Robert Louden, 231–429. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. |
| BBM | Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace (AA 8)<br>"Determination of the Concept of a Human Race." Translated by Holly Wilson and Günter Zöller. In *Anthropology*, 145–59. |
| BDG | Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes (AA 2)<br>"The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God." In *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, translated and edited by David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote, 107–201. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. |
| Bem | Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen (AA 20)<br>"Remarks in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*." In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, translated and edited by Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer, 63–202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. |
| Br | Kants Briefwechsel (AA 10–12)<br>*Correspondence*. Translated and edited by Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. |

EACG Entwurf und Ankündigung eines Collegii der physischen Geographie (AA 2)
"Plan and Announcement of a Series of Lectures on Physical Geography." Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, edited by Eric Watkins, 386–95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

EEKU Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft (AA 20)
"First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*." In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer and translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, 1–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

FBZE Fortgesetzte Betrachtung der seit einiger Zeit wahrgenommenen Erderschütterungen (AA 1)
"Continued Observations on the Earthquakes that Have Been Experienced for Some Time." Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, 365–73.

FEV Die Frage, ob die Erde veralte, physikalisch erwogen (AA 1)
"The Question, Whether the Earth Is Ageing, Considered from a Physical Point of View." Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, 165–81.

FM Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnitzens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat? (AA 20)
"What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Kant and Kant?" Translated by Peter Heath. In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, edited by Henry Allison and Peter Heath, and translated by Gary Hatfield, Michael Friedman, Henry Allison, and Peter Heath, 349–412. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

GMS Grundlugung zur Metaphysik der Sitten (AA 4)
*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. In *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary Gregor, 37–108. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

GSE Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen (AA 2)
"Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime." In *Anthropology*, 18–62.

GSK Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte (AA 1)
"Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces." Translated by Jeffrey Edwards and Martin Schönfeld. In *Natural Science*, 1–155.

GTP Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie (AA 8)
"On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy." Translated by Günter Zöller. In *Anthropology*, 195–218.

IaG Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht (AA 8)
"Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim." Translated by Allen Wood. In *Anthropology*, 107–20.

KpV Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (AA 5)
*Critique of Practical Reason*. In *Practical Philosophy*, 133–271.

| | |
|---|---|
| KU | Kritik der Urteilskraft (AA 5)<br>*Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 53–346. |
| Log | Logik (AA 9)<br>"The Jäsche Logic." In *Lectures on Logic*, translated and edited by Michael Young, 527–640. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. |
| MAM | Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschheitsgeschichte (AA 8)<br>"Conjectural Beginning of Human History." Translated by Allen Wood. In *Anthropology*, 160–75. |
| MCP | De Medicina Corporis, quae Philosophorum est (AA 15)<br>"On the Philosopher's Medicine of the Body." Translated by Mary Gregor. In *Anthropology*, 182–91. |
| MS | Die Metaphysik der Sitten (AA 6)<br>*The Metaphysics of Morals*. In *Practical Philosophy*, 353–603. |
| NEV | Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbenjahre von 1765–1766 (AA 2)<br>"M. Immanuel Kant's Announcement of the Programme of His Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766." In *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 287–300. |
| NTH | Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels (AA 1)<br>"Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens." Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, 182–308. |
| Päd | Pädagogik (AA 9)<br>"Lectures on Pedagogy." Translated by Robert Louden. In *Anthropology*, 437–85. |
| PG | Physische Geographie (AA 9)<br>*Physical Geography*. Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, 434–679. |
| Prol | *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird aufterten können* (AA 4)<br>"Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science." Translated by Gary Hatfield. In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, 49–169. |
| R | Reflexionen (AA 15–19)<br>*Notes and Fragments*. Edited by Paul Guyer, and translated by Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer, and Frederick Rauscher. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. |
| RezHerder | Recensionen von J. G. Herders Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menscheit (AA 8)<br>"Review of J. G. Herder's *Ideas for the philosophy of the history of humanity*. Parts 1 and 2." Translated by Allen Wood. In *Anthropology*, 121–42. |

| | |
|---|---|
| RGV | Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft (AA 6)<br>"Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason." In *Religion and Rational Theology*, translated and edited by Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni, 39–215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. |
| SF | Der Streit der Fakultäten (AA 7)<br>"The Conflict of Faculties." In *Religion*, 233–327. |
| TP | Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis (AA 8)<br>"On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice." In *Practical Philosophy*, 273–309. |
| TU | Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch die Träume der Metaphysik (AA 2)<br>"Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics." In *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 301–59. |
| TW | Neue Anmerkungen zur Erläuterung der Theorie der Winde (AA 1)<br>"New Notes to Explain the Theory of the Winds." Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, 374–85. |
| V-Anth/Busolt | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1788/1789, Busolt (AA 25)<br>"Anthropology Busolt" (excerpts). Translated by Allen Wood. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 511–24. |
| V-Anth/Collins | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1772/1773, Collins (AA 25)<br>"Anthropology Collins" (excerpts). Translated by Allen Wood. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, edited by Allen Wood and Robert Louden, 11–26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. |
| V-Anth/Dohna | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1791/1792, Dohna-Wundlacken. In *Die philosophischen Hauptvorlesungen Immanuel Kants: nach den neu aufgefundenen Kollegheften des Grafen Heinrich zu Dohna-Wundlacken*, edited by Arnold Kowalewski, 71–373. München: Rösl, 1924. References to this set of lecture notes are to the manuscript (ms.) page numbers specified in Kowalewski 1924. |
| V-Anth/Fried | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1775/1776, Friedländer (AA 25)<br>"Anthropology Friedländer." Translated by Felicitas Munzel. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 37–255. |
| V-Anth/Mensch | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1781/1782, Menschenkunde (AA 25)<br>"Menschenkunde." Translated by Robert Louden. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 281–333. |
| V-Anth/Mron | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1784/1785, Mrongovius (AA 25)<br>"Anthropology Mrongovius." Translated by Robert Clewis. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 335–509. |

| | |
|---|---|
| V-Anth/Parow | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1772/1773, Parow (AA 25)<br>"Anthropology Parow" (excerpts). Translated by Allen Wood. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 27–36. |
| V-Anth/Pillau | Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1777/1778, Pillau (AA 25)<br>"Anthropology Pillau" (excerpts). Translated by Allen Wood. In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 257–79. |
| VBO | Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus (AA 2)<br>"An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism." In *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, 67–76. |
| VEF | Vorarbeiten zu Zum Ewigen Frieden (AA 23)<br>"Drafts for Towards Perpetual Peace." In *Lectures and Drafts on Political Philosophy*, edited by Frederick Rauscher, and translated by Frederick Rauscher and Kenneth Westphal, 207–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. |
| V-Lo/Blomberg | Logik Blomberg (AA 24)<br>"The Blomberg Logic." In *Lectures on Logic*, 1–246. |
| V-Lo/Busolt | Logik Busolt (AA 24) |
| V-Lo/Dohna | Logik Dohna-Wundlacken (AA 24)<br>"The Dohna-Wundlacken Logic." In *Lectures on Logic*, 425–516. |
| V-Lo/Pölitz | Logik Pölitz (AA 24) |
| V-Lo/Wiener | Wiener Logik (AA 24)<br>"The Vienna Logic." In *Lectures on Logic*, 249–377. |
| V-Met/Herder | Metaphysik Herder (AA 28)<br>"Metaphysik Herder" (selections). In *Lectures on Metaphysics*, translated and edited by Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon, 1–16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. |
| V-Met/Mron | Metaphysik Mrongovius (AA 29)<br>"Metaphysik Mrongovius." In *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 107–286. |
| V-Met-L1/Pölitz | Metaphysik L1 (AA 28)<br>"Metaphysik L1." In *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 17–106. |
| V-Met-L2/Pölitz | Metaphysik L2 (AA 28)<br>"Metaphysik L2." In *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 297–354. |
| V-Mo/Collins | Moralphilosophie Collins (AA 27)<br>"Moral Philosophy: Collins's Lecture Notes." In *Lectures on Ethics*, edited by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, and translated by Peter Heath, 37–222. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. |
| V-Mo/Mron II | Moral Mrongovius II (AA 29)<br>"Morality According to Prof. Kant: Mrongovius's Second Set of Lecture Notes (Selections)." In *Lectures on Ethics*, 223–48. |
| V-Mo/Vigil | Metaphysik der Sitten Vigilantius (AA 27)<br>"Kant on the Metaphysics of Morals: Vigilantius's Lecture Notes." In *Lectures on Ethics*, 249–452. |

| | |
|---|---|
| V-PG/Bergk | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1791(?), Bergk (AA 26.2) |
| V-PG/Dohna | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1792, Dohna (AA 26.2) |
| V-PG/Dönhoff | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1782, Dönhoff (AA 26.2) |
| V-PG/Hesse | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1770, Hesse (AA 26.2) |
| V-PG/Holstein | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1757–1759, Holstein (AA 26.1) |
| V-PG/Kaehler | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1775, Kaehler (AA 26.2) |
| V-PG/Messina | Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie 1776(?), Messina (AA 26.2) |
| V-Ph/Danzinger | Danzinger Physik (AA 29) |
| VRM | Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen (AA 2)<br>"Of the Different Races of Human Beings." Translated by Holly Wilson and Günter Zöller. In *Anthropology*, 82–97. |
| VSF | Vorarbeiten zum Streit der Fakultäten (AA 23)<br>"Drafts for Conflict of the Faculties." In *Lectures and Drafts on Political Philosophy*, 359–67. |
| VT | Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie (AA 8)<br>"On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy." In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, 425–45. |
| VUE | Von den Ursachen der Erderschütterungen bei Gelegenheit des Unglücks, welches die westliche Länder von Europa gegen das Ende des vorigen Jahres betroffen hat (AA 1)<br>"On the Causes of Earthquakes on the Occasion of the Calamity That Befell the Western Countries of Europe towards the End of Last Year." Translated by Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, 327–36. |
| WA | Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? (AA 8)<br>"An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" In *Practical Philosophy*, 11–22. |
| WDO | Was heißt sich im Denken orientiren? (AA 8)<br>"What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" In *Religion*, 1–17. |
| ZeF | Zum ewigen Frieden (AA 8)<br>"Toward Perpetual Peace." In *Practical Philosophy*, 311–51. |

# General Introduction

## I.1. The Debate Continues

This book interrogates Kant's philosophy with a deep focus on his theory of race and his relation to racism. Scholars who have participated in the discourse on Kant and racism, while they may disagree over interpretive issues, are or should be united by the question of what one can do to confront racism today and what, if any, resources Kant's philosophy can still offer to this end. There is no simple answer to this kind of question. And no one can claim to have finally figured it all out. The never-ending work requires collective efforts and open-minded explorations. I show my indebtedness to the efforts others have already made by critically engaging with and building on their work in this introduction and in the rest of the book. So I begin.

Amid worldwide "Black Lives Matter" protests following the killing of George Floyd, a black man, by a white police officer in the United States (May 25, 2020), a German debate about *Kants Rassismus* unfolded in public. I will refer to it as "the post-Floyd debate." The debate revolved around the following basic questions. Was Kant a "racist" (Willaschek 2020a, 2020b) or was he, by the final analysis, an "antiracist" (Wolff 2020a, 2020b)? If he admittedly said racist things, was he just being a *Kind seiner Zeit* (Willaschek 2020a)?[1] And, against the backdrop of debates about what to do with the monuments to racist historical figures in public spaces, should the monument to Kant—be it the literal or the metaphoric one—be left standing?[2] This question is in

[1] See Zorn 2020 for a quick overview of, followed by an attempt to resolve, the Willaschek-Wolff controversy. I thank Thomas Sturm for first drawing my attention to the controversy.

[2] There is an actual monument to Kant in what is now the Russian Kaliningrad (once the Prussian Königsberg, where Kant was born and spent most of his life). It was defaced with pink paint in 2018. The defacement allegedly reflected the Russian nationalist sentiment (Kishkovsky 2018). If so, it had nothing to do with Kant's racial views. The image of the defaced monument was nonetheless widely used in the post-Floyd debate about Kant and racism, this time as a metaphor. For context, the whole German debate was triggered by an interview with historian Michael Zeuske, an expert on the history of slavery, at the *Deutschlandradio Kultur* on June 13, 2020. The backdrop of the interview was that demonstrations against police brutality and racism under the banner "Black Lives Matter" were erupting across Europe as well as in the United States. A week earlier (June 7), the statue of Edward Colston was toppled in Bristol for his connections to slavery (Zahlen 2020). Against this

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turn tied to the one about whether Kant's philosophy contains uniquely valuable or even indispensable resources for combating racism today. Is it the case, to borrow a line from one Russian observer of the debate, that Kant's philosophy is "one of the very few positions from which it is possible today to forcefully argue, lawfully demand and practically organise the consistent and thorough eradication of racism" (Chaly 2020: 97–98)?

With this post-Floyd debate behind us (besides all the secondary literature on Kant's racial views), one may be tempted by the following response when asked about Kant and race: well, so much has already been said about it; there is nothing more to say; we shall move on. The problem, however, is that the post-Floyd debate did little to deepen our understanding of Kant's racial views,[3] although we can appreciate the renewed attention it brought to the topic. It manifested some of the problematic but so far rarely questioned assumptions and tendencies in the prevailing discourse on Kant, race, and racism.[4] I will focus on two of these. One is an overly individualistic approach to the question about Kant's relation to racism. The other is the assumption of a logical contradiction between Kant's core moral claims and his racist views. In what follows, I explain and critique each of these (sections I.2 and I.3). I then propose my alternative reading (section I.4) and explain some of its implications (section I.5). I end by explaining the subtitle of this book, as a way to introduce each of the six main chapters plus a forward-looking conclusion (section I.6).

backdrop, Zeuske suggested that, if one were sincere about shedding light on racism and toppling monuments, one should also look at great minds such as Kant (Zeuske and Wuttke 2020). It makes sense, then, that we see explicit counter-claims that the "monument" to Kant can and even must be left standing—in Willaschek 2020a, 2020b; Brumlik 2020; and Chaly 2020, for instance. The last of these speaks from a Russian perspective and conjures up the image of an "anti-monument campaign" by "Western radicals" akin to "resentful and thoughtless mobs" (Chaly 2020: 96–97).

[3] One may complain that I am being unfair to the authors involved in the debate: they were publishing op-eds intended for the general public, not research articles for an academic audience; so one should not hold them to the typical standards of academic rigor. I am not so sure. A scholar who publishes an op-ed on a controversial topic makes a *decision* about which positions they repackage in accessible terms and present to the public. They always have the option to conduct a thorough research of the relevant literature and question the prevailing scholarly opinions, for instance, *before* they go public.

[4] By the "prevailing discourse," I am referring to the most frequently cited works whenever the subject of Kant and racism comes up. They are narrative shaping in this way. These include Eze 1995; Mills 2005; and Bernasconi 2001, 2002, on the one hand, and Louden 2000; Hill and Boxill 2001; Kleingeld 2007; and Allais 2016, on the other. This division roughly tracks whether the authors are mostly critical of Kant and his philosophy in light of his racist views or they are primarily interested in defending Kant's philosophy in spite of his admittedly racist views. This dichotomy may not capture many other works that have been published on Kant's racial views. I will refer to these at appropriate moments.

## I.2. It Is Not Just about Kant: Reconceptualizing His Relation to Racism

The standard approach to Kant's racial views is largely individualistic. It is mostly about what Kant said (or did not say) and what we can (or cannot) infer about him—his intentions, character, and so on—from his pronouncements (or silences) about certain subjects. This is reflected in how commentators formulate their question ("Kant—a racist?" [Zorn 2020; Gerhardt 2020]),[5] describe the object of their investigation ("Kant's racism" [Allais 2016]), declare their positions ("Kant was an antiracist" [Wolff 2020a] versus "Kant was very much a racist" [Willaschek 2020b]), and weigh the relevant texts against one another (for example, prioritize Kant's own publications over works edited by others or the student notes of his lectures, on the assumption that the former more accurately represent his intentions and considered views [Wolff 2020a]).[6] In so doing, very few have paused to question the fruitfulness of the individualistic approach or, for that matter, to clarify the very notion of racism.[7]

Within the individualistic paradigm, some scholars tend to *personalize* Kant's admittedly racist views and thereby make them hermeneutically irrelevant to the fundamentals of his philosophy. This is to *otherize the racist Kant* for the sake of protecting the supposed core of his *philosophy*. Robert Louden, for instance, characterizes Kant's problematic claims about race as regrettable "private prejudices" but insists that his theory is "stronger than his prejudices." With this neat demarcation, Louden's advice is that "We should

[5] "Kant—Ein Rassist?" was also the title for a six-part discussion series on Kant, race, and racism hosted by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (https://www.bbaw.de/mediathek/archiv-2020/kant-ein-rassist-interdisziplinaere-diskussionsreihe, accessed January 20, 2022). According to Mateo 2020 (part of the earlier debate on *Kants Rassismus*), whether Kant was a racist is the wrong question to ask, because the crucial problem does not lie in Kant's racist attitudes but in the extent to which we need to reassess his philosophical work against the backdrop of his racial views (Mateo and Stubenrauch 2022 fleshes out this suggestion).

[6] Unless otherwise noted, I translate the materials from the German debate into English whenever I am quoting them.

[7] There are a few exceptions. Lucy Allais (2016) explicitly engages with the debate among recent race theorists about how to define 'racism.' Charles Mills was directly involved in that debate and declared an objection to "*all* individualist analyses" of racism (2003: 31). This provided the theoretical backdrop for understanding Mills's proposal that Kant's racism should be "conceptualized as an ideology" (2014: 128). Marcus Willaschek (2020b), being mindful of the need to clarify what one means when one talks about Kant's *Rassismus*, warns against reducing it to Kant's biological-genetic theory of human races as Michael Wolff (2020a) did. On Willaschek's account, racism consists in discriminations on the basis of skin color and, so understood, is logically independent of Kant's (pseudo-)scientific theory of race. For a recent analysis of the conceptions of racism operative in the German literature on Kant and racism, see Hahmann 2022.

not hide or suppress the prejudices, but neither should we overvalue them or try to inflate them into something they are not" (2000: 105). Similarly, Allen Wood emphasizes "the task of separating Kant's errors, or the prejudices of his time or his personality, from the philosophical principles on which we are grounding ethical theory" (2008: 15). In these terms, Wood describes the controversy over Kant's racist prejudices as between "those who take philosophical principles seriously" and "those who are skeptical about the whole project of systematic philosophy." Wood reduces the latter camp's position to a matter of personal attacks on Kant, insinuating that the "attackers" are politically motivated and have no interest in achieving "philosophical insights" with their "sensational exposés" (2008: 8–9). The former camp, by contrast, is said to include "the leading writers on Kantian ethics who have addressed this issue," namely Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill (2001), Marcia Baron (2001), and Wood himself (1999: 3–7, 338–39).[8] These writers, Wood suggests, admit that "Kant regarded nonwhite races as inferior to whites," but focus on the fact that "he also held on basic philosophical grounds an egalitarian position about all human beings," because "it is this latter position that matters to Kantian ethics" (2008: 8).

Another common thread within the individualistic paradigm is the narrative that Kant *redeemed himself* later in his life (he died in 1804). This narrative originated with Pauline Kleingeld's pathbreaking paper "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race" (2007). As the paper's title suggests, Kleingeld's Kant belatedly reversed his racist position.[9] The reasoning goes as follows: until at least the end of the 1780s, Kant "simultaneously defended a universalist moral theory and a racial hierarchy"; he "radically revised his views on race during the 1790s," however, as evidenced by his condemnations of colonialism and slavery in "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795) and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797); in this way, he "finally resolved" the earlier tension between "his disturbing views on race [and] his own moral universalism" and became "more egalitarian with regard to race" (Kleingeld 2007: 575, 582–92).[10] This conclusion is often invoked to show that Kant finally renounced racism and did so on philosophical grounds—another proof, or at least hope, that his

[8] Wood 2008: 276n11. In this footnote, Wood writes (likely to humor the reader): "perhaps I say this is the position of 'leading' writers only because I have defended it myself."

[9] Kleingeld, like most commentators on Kant and racism, equates racism with a hierarchical view of the races or "racial hierarchism." I challenge this assumption in Chapter 2.

[10] There were forceful counters to this conclusion (Bernasconi 2011; Valdez 2017). Kleingeld made no attempt to address them in her subsequent publications on Kant's racial views (Kleingeld 2019: 8–9; 2021: 356–57).

philosophy is stronger than his former prejudices.[11] Even when there is no explicit reference to Kleingeld's 2007 paper, the narrative it set in motion is sometimes repeated with resounding confidence.[12] As for those who seem undecided about whether the very late Kant in fact reversed his racist position, they may give Kleingeld's conclusion a pass and simply redirect our attention to Kant's supposedly contradictory position in the 1780s (Mills 2014; Allais 2016; Willaschek 2020b). This gives a reporter on the post-Floyd debate the impression that Kleingeld's paper remains to be a *Goldstandard* in the constantly renewed controversies about Kant's racism (Zorn 2021).[13]

An alternative explanation is that the staying power of Kleingeld's "second thoughts" narrative has mainly to do with the appeal of the idea that Kant eventually lived up to the promise of his practical philosophy by becoming a sort of racial egalitarian. As Robert Bernasconi puts it, there is a "ready audience" for this idea, even if there is every reason to "wonder whether we are just being served up a new secular version of the old story of a deathbed conversion, which is retold more because it is comforting than because it meets the basic standards of historical scholarship" (2011: 291). I will provide some support for this assessment in Chapter 4, where we shall see that the later Kant never "categorically and repeatedly condemns chattel slavery" as Kleingeld claimed, which she used as definitive evidence for Kant's change of mind about race (2007: 588). Moreover, Kant's racist position is multifaceted. It concerns not only the Amerindians and "Negroes" but also the "Gypsies," the "Orientals," and so on (Hund 2011). As such, it cannot be overturned simply by a few critical remarks about slavery or about colonialism for that matter. Kant never wavered, for instance, on his exclusion of the Chinese and Asiatic Indians from the history of philosophy on account of their racialized cognitive deficiencies (I will explain this below and then again in Chapter 6).

More important, regardless of whether Kant changed his personal stance on race, he could not undo the racist sentiments and worldviews he might have helped to cultivate in the hearts and minds of other people through his numerous publications,[14] decades of lectures, and countless copies of student

[11] For instance, Wood 2008: 10–11; Ypi 2014: 101; Eberl 2019: 389; McCabe 2019: 6–7; Bahners 2020; Biskamp 2020; Lieder 2020.

[12] Gerhardt 2020 and Wolff 2020a are two recent examples.

[13] This reporter was reporting on the first half of the six-part discussion series on the question "Kant—Ein Rassist?" at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (see note 4 above). Kleingeld was a speaker in Part 2.

[14] As I explain in Chapter 1, the racist claims found in some of Kant's publications in the 1770s and 1780s would appear *verbatim* in the reprints that continued to be published well into the 1790s.

notes of those lectures that circulated beyond his classroom.[15] The notion of racism that best captures this point has little to with what was in Kant's own head or heart. Rather, it concerns the *formation of racist ideology* in a network of socially embedded actors and meaning makers. I will develop this point in Chapter 2, by drawing on Sally Haslanger's (2017) work on racism as "ideological formation." In so doing, I will supplement the predominantly individualistic discourse about Kant's racism with an investigation of his *relation* to racism as an exclusionary ideology. In particular, I will look into what significant role(s) he might have played, wittingly or not, in shaping modern racist ideology that was still nascent at the time.[16] I will do so by locating Kant in a nexus of *power* relations, wherein his writings and teachings about race could receive considerable uptake on the part of other relevant social actors and meaning makers.

This reconceptualization of Kant's relation to racism undercuts some of the strategies that have been used to defend his philosophy against the charge of racism. One such strategy is to marginalize some of the texts that contain racist claims by casting doubt on their credibility as accurate representations of Kant's mature views.[17] For instance, Michael Wolff points out that Kant's *Physical Geography* (1802) was edited by Friedrich Theodor Rink on the basis of materials from Kant's precritical period (prior to 1781) and that the allegedly racist claims found in it—claims that degrade people on the basis of their skin color and similar characteristics—are basically secondhand empirical claims borrowed from other sources, which Kant was unable to fact-check. As a result, Wolff contends, we should not treat the text as faithfully representing the considered views of Kant the critical philosopher (Wolff 2020a). Wolff is factually correct about the composition of the *Physical Geography* (Stark 2011a). This fact becomes moot, however, when the question is not what Kant thought but what he might have contributed

[15] These are mainly notes of Kant's lectures on physical geography and anthropology, which were among his most popular courses. There were numerous sets of known student notes of both (Naragon 2006a, 2006b). I discuss how race figures in Kant's physical geography and anthropology, respectively, in Chapter 1.

[16] A hallmark of modern racist ideology is the use of science to justify institutionalized racial exclusions and racial hegemony more broadly. For this practice to get off the ground, there must be a (pseudo-)scientific theory of race to provide the framework for racializing certain characteristics. Kant's main contribution lies in this part.

[17] Even if this strategy succeeds, it still cannot save Kant's philosophy from the encroachment of racism. That is, even if one restricts oneself to Kant's own publications from the critical period (starting in 1781), a good case can still be made for saying that his racist views are inextricably tied to important parts of his philosophical system. On this point, see Marwah 2019: 77–124; Hahmann 2022; Mateo and Stubenrauch 2022. I will also confirm this point in Chapters 3 and 4.

to the system of information sharing, knowledge production, and meaning making in which modern racist ideology came to take shape.[18] Did ordinary readers of the *Physical Geography* suspend their judgments until they could figure out whether it represented its putative author's own beliefs? I doubt that it even occurred to them to ask such a question. The fact that Kant legally authorized Rink to edit the *Physical Geography* (Stark 2011a: 82) and had it published under his own name sufficed to establish its perceived authenticity. Moreover, what we often find in this and other similar texts, such as Kant's lectures on anthropology and physical geography, are denigrations of nonwhites that appeal to the audiences' *imagination* and can therefore have *subliminal* effects on their perceptions. Even if the later Kant had used all his intellectual and positional power to actively, openly, and forcefully counter those depictions, which he most definitely did not do, he would not have been able to undo the impressions they already left.

This takes me to a second strategy used by some of Kant's defenders. It boils down to an attempt to neutralize the force of his racist claims by insisting that they are mere relics of the past, pronounced by a man who is long gone. Allen Wood, speculating that "attacks" on Kant concerning his racist views come from "a mistaken analogy between the right way to view historical philosophers and the right way to view present-day political figures," submits the following disanalogy between the two.

> Politicians are people who wield power over us, and it is important that we be able to have personal trust in their sincere adherence to the principles they advocate. This is not true of long-dead philosophers whose texts we study, or at least it should not be. What we learn from them should rest not on the author's moral authority but on the content of the doctrines and the strength of the arguments for them. (2008: 9–10)

Granted, when we study a philosophical text, we should not dwell on the moral character of the philosopher partly because, well, we can never be certain about someone's character. But it is simplistic to say that a philosopher like Kant, just because he is long dead, wields no power over us. Kant is not just any dead philosopher. Rather, as a prominent scholar and lifelong

[18] I say more about such a system in Chapter 4, where I take a long view of the historical context in which Kant became interested in the topic of race and thereby developed the kind of scientific notion of race that would underpin modern racist ideology.

educator who was prolific in both roles, he was well positioned in a temporally extended network of (actually or potentially) powerful social actors and meaning makers to transform narratives and shape ideologies. His role in the formation of modern racist ideology is one example.

To illustrate this point with a concrete example, I will explain in Chapter 6 how Kant's fateful intervention in the eighteenth-century debate about the origin of philosophy helped to drown out the previously dominant view that philosophy originated in the East (India or Egypt) as well as the once pluralist and inclusive approach to "history of philosophy." To support his own view that true philosophy could only have started with the Greeks, Kant would combine many of the concepts he developed in his pure philosophy—including the *Critique of Pure Reason*—with racist claims about the Chinese and Indians, for instance, who in his view lacked the capacity to form abstract thoughts and were therefore incapable of philosophy (or any other science properly so called). His conclusion was summarized in the well-known Jäsche Logic (published as "Immanuel Kant's Logic: A Manual for Lectures" in 1800).

> Among all peoples, then, the *Greeks* first began to philosophize. For they first attempted to cultivate cognitions of reason, not with images as the guiding thread, but *in abstracto*, while other peoples always sought to make concepts understandable only *through images in concreto*. Even today there are peoples, like the Chinese and some Indians, who [still think in this way]. (Log, 9: 27)

The fact that the Jäsche Logic, though edited by someone else, was published under Kant's name with his blessing (Lu-Adler 2018b: 9–17) sufficed to give the impression that the above passage represented his final verdict about the origin of philosophy. The reasoning behind it would be echoed in how his immediate followers defended the Greek origin thesis (Park 2013: 69–95). It is also reflected in how the Western-Eurocentric curriculum of "history of philosophy," which has dominated higher education to this day, is still rationalized (as I shall explain in Chapter 6). Such is the power that Kant continues to wield over us, largely through institutionalized practices of his opinion. We will start recognizing this once we look beyond what Kant said and consider how he was socially situated, insofar as this could determine the real-life *uptake* and lasting impact of his teachings and writings. Philosophizing from some social locations can amount to a mighty political

act,[19] regardless of whether the philosopher himself intends or recognizes it as such.

Now, Wood may respond as follows. Given that there is a "blatant contradiction" between the core claims of Kant's pure moral philosophy and his admittedly racist prejudices, you have a simple binary choice to make: either you prioritize the former, which is where true "philosophical insights" are, or you dwell on the latter, in which case "it remains wholly obscure what philosophical conclusions, if any," you intend people to draw from your "exposés." The choice is as easy as it can be for Wood, since leading Kantian ethicists like him have already spoken: what really "matters" is that Kant "held on basic philosophical grounds an egalitarian position about all human beings" (2008: 8–9). A corollary of this choice is a preemptive dismissal of any further inquiry about Kant's racial views as philosophically insignificant and therefore a waste of time.

This simultaneously defensive and dismissive strategy was subsequently echoed in a piece published in the American Philosophical Association's newsletter on teaching, titled "Kant Was a Racist: Now What?" The author is evidently impatient with anyone who wants to look into Kant's racial views: "it's not clear why we should be interested in someone's views except where they seem likely to be philosophically significant and fruitful, and Kant's views on race are certainly not that." On the assumption that these views straightforwardly contradict Kant's moral theory, the author contends that this theory "can and should be understood independent of his racist views"—not only because it is "not fatally infected" by his racism but also because it contains "a powerful account of human dignity the *logic* of which undermined" the latter (McCabe 2019: 6–7).

Kant himself would beg to differ, though. For one, as I shall explain in Chapters 3 and 4, he treated "race" as a cutting-edge topic of his time, which was at once theoretically challenging and practically significant albeit controversial. And he evidently saw his own contributions to the controversy as, *philosophically* speaking, groundbreaking and more sophisticated than any other alternative on the table. For another, he would be baffled by the claim that there is a direct contradiction between his moral philosophy and his exclusion of nonwhites from, say, the candidacy for advanced cultural

[19] See Zurn 2021 for an illuminating study of the politics of inquiry, which reveals that who gets to be curious, when, and how reflects the social reality of differential *power* allocations. My study in Chapter 4 also speaks to this point.

achievements on account of their racialized characteristics. Such a claim betrays a misunderstanding of how Kant's moral philosophy relates to other parts of his intricate system. In short, there is *no logical contradiction* between his pure moral claims and his racist views. It is necessary to clarify this point if we are to further the conversation about Kant and racism and eventually to answer the important question of what, if anything, his philosophy can still offer to the ongoing antiracist struggles. Let me explain.

## I.3. Is There Really a "Contradiction"?

The entire debate over Kant and racism over the last couple of decades revolves around a presumed logical contradiction. Here is one way to describe the contradiction: Kant simultaneously argued that *all* humans deserve respect on account of their humanity (call this "moral universalism") and withheld this respect from *some* humans due to their race ("racist particularism" à la Mills). Referring to Kant's claims in his third and final essay on race (1788) that "the Negro . . . stands on the lowest of all the other steps that we have named as differences of the races" and that the Amerindian "ranks still far below even the Negro" (GTP, 8: 176), Kleingeld writes:

> The racial hierarchy . . . goes against the presumption of human equality which one would expect from someone with a universalist moral theory. After all, the basic moral principle which Kant formulates during the 1780s, the Categorical Imperative in its several versions, is, at least in its wording, addressed to all humans (or, even more broadly, to all finite rational beings). (2007: 574)

This assumption of a contradiction between Kant's racism (understood as racial hierarchism) and his core moral claims is pivotal to Kleingeld's review of existing literature.

Kleingeld divides the scholars involved into two camps, depending on whether they interpret Kant as a "consistent inegalitarian" or an "inconsistent universalist." Proponents of the first reading (Eze 1995; Larrimore 1999; Bernasconi 2001, 2002; Mills 2005) "highlight Kant's white supremacist comments, and argue that his moral theory is less than universalist." Proponents of the second reading (Louden 2000; Hill and Boxill 2001; McCarthy 2004; among others) hold that "Kant's main theory as defended

during the 1780s and 1790s is truly universalist, even though Kant fundamentally contradicts this theory with his racial hierarchy" (Kleingeld 2007: 575). Kleingeld shares both camps' assumption of a contradiction, only to argue that it disappeared from Kant's later works.

> During the 1780s, as he wrote the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and probably until at least 1792, his disturbing views on race contradicted his own moral universalism. He finally resolved this contradiction during the mid-1790s, at the latest during the writing of the manuscript for *Toward Perpetual Peace*. (2007: 592)

This narrative of the presence followed by eventual resolution of a contradiction resurfaced in the post-Floyd debate that I mentioned in section I.1, especially in the exchanges between Marcus Willaschek and Michael Wolff.

Willaschek, in his initial piece on Kant being a racist, submits that Kant's denigration of blacks among other groups is regrettably "in contradiction to his own moral-philosophical universalism, which granted all human beings [*Menschen*] an absolute worth." Willaschek takes this to be a "grave misjudgment" that resulted from Kant's failure "to consistently think through his basic moral and political commitments" (2020a). Subsequently addressing Wolff's denial of any genuine contradiction on Kant's part, Willaschek contends that one can defend Kant's moral-philosophical universalism, which "accords equal dignity to all human beings," only if one "clearly articulates the contradiction with Kant's racist (as well as sexist and antisemitic) statements." By denying this contradiction, Willaschek argues, Wolff and his associates have made things "too easy for themselves" (2020b).

As for Wolff, he implicitly concedes that there *would* be the kind of contradiction that everyone else was talking about *if* Kant harbored racism (defined as racial discrimination by Willaschek). For Kant's universalism "precludes racial discrimination" (Wolff 2020a). To deny that racism in this sense actually applies to Kant, Wolff shifts the focus to Kant's scientific theory of race. He invokes Kant's monogenism—the view that different races and varieties of humans nevertheless make the same species—and his putative criticism of colonialism to infer that, far from being a racist, Kant was actually an "antiracist" (2020a). Wolff urges Willaschek to accept this conclusion because, well, if one goes so far as to admit that Kant granted equal rights to all people, then one is also committed to the following: "the Categorical Imperative implies the duty to respect the dignity of every human being, no

matter what merely empirical characteristics are attributed to him" (2020b). Wolff's argument is flawed in multiple ways, including an uninformed claim about what Kant's scientific monogenism entails.[20] But I shall focus on the issue of contradiction. To put it simply, Wolff's case for Kant being an antiracist presupposes that Kant's universalist moral principles logically contradict racism and, on the (wrong) assumption that antiracism is the logical opposite of racism, entail antiracism (I will return to the topic of antiracism in section I.4).

Thus, all parties mentioned so far seem to agree that there is a simple contradiction between racism and (a literal reading of) Kant's moral universalism, the latter being represented by the Categorical Imperative as expressed through the Formula of Humanity. Here is the formula in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785): "So act that you use humanity [*Menschheit*], whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (GMS, 4: 429). When commentators (implicitly) invoke this formula to talk about Kant's moral universalism and to claim that it—if read literally—is diametrically opposed to racism, they typically present the universalism in question as *generalizability* over the domain of all *human beings* qua concretely embodied beings. Such is how Charles Mills spells out the "flagrant" contradiction between a literal, unrestricted universalist reading of Kant's moral principles and his racism: on the one hand, according to the unqualified universalism, "all *biological humans*/all races, as full persons, must be treated as ends, never as mere means"; on the other hand, according to the racist particularism, some races—blacks and Amerindians to be specific—may be used as means by being "colonized and enslaved" (2014: 146, emphasis added).

Note Mills's use of the expression 'biological humans.' If this is how he renders the concept *Menschheit* in the original Formula of Humanity, he has basically talked past Kant. As Henry Allison explains, in the context of the *Groundwork* Kant uses 'humanity' to signify the *rational nature* of the human being as such, which alone has absolute worth and must be treated as an end in itself on account of its capacity for morality. So construed, 'humanity' refers neither to individual human beings—let alone to them qua biological beings—nor even to the human species (2011: 209–18). It is simply

[20] As I explain in Chapter 4, monogenesis was in fact "not the compassionate opposite of polygenesis" (Malcolmson 2013: 112) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Kant, in particular, proved this point. Mills (2014) has also touched on this issue, showing not only the logical possibility but also historical manifestations of "monogenetic racism" (besides its articulation in Kant's work).

"a place-holder for finite rational agency" (2011: 207). When Kant does talk about "human beings" in the *Groundwork*, he conceptualizes them solely as "beings with a rational nature" or "the capacity to recognize and obey the categorical imperative" (2011: 207n6).

Mills misconstrued the literal meaning of Kant's Formula of Humanity, then, by reducing it to a general proposition about all biological humans. Building on this reduction, Mills argues that only a radical revision can make Kant consistent: the "seemingly universalist egalitarian ethico-political pronouncements in Kant were not really intended to be universalist at all," but were "tacitly referencing white humans (the 'real' humans)"; otherwise, a genuinely universalist reading of Kant's work would presuppose an astonishing degree of "cognitive dissonance" on his part (2014: 144–45). Unfortunately, most of Mills's critics and defendants alike have failed to register his mistake in thinking that the *universality* of Kant's moral principles, if read literally, means their *generalizability* to all concretely embodied human beings. Here is, for example, Kleingeld's response to Mills:

> we should acknowledge the tension between the *general phrasing* of Kant's principles and the unstated restrictions in their application. If we translate the Categorical Imperative into a principle for white males, we lose one side of this tension. (2019: 16, emphasis added)

Kleingeld is wrong, however, to describe Kant's highest principles as worded in "general terms" (2019: 14). As I shall explain in Chapter 1, there is a profound difference between universality and generality in Kant's philosophy.

To give a preview here, the key lies in a distinction between two kinds of abstraction. First, there is what Kant calls "logical abstraction." In this case, one starts with particular cognitions (lower cognitions), compares them in terms of similarities and differences, *abstracts from the differences*, and thereby arrives at a higher cognition that represents what they have in common. Such a process may be iterated until one reaches the highest cognition (Log, 9: 94–99). In this way, one can obtain a hierarchy of concepts that differ in degrees of generality. A simple logical rule governs the relation between the higher and lower concepts: "What belongs to or contradicts higher concepts also belongs to or contradicts all lower concepts that are contained under those higher ones" (9: 98). Second, there is what I call "real abstraction," which is *abstraction from certain empirical conditions of application*. To illustrate, consider Kant's distinction of pure and applied logics. Pure

logic studies the understanding entirely *in abstracto* and a priori, in which case we must "abstract from all empirical conditions under which our understanding is exercised." By contrast, applied logic studies, a posteriori, the understanding "*in concreto*, namely under the contingent conditions of the subject, which can hinder or promote this use." These two logics are "entirely separated" from each other (A52–4/B77–9).

When some commentators describe Kant's highest moral principles, qua universal, as "race-neutral in their formulation" (Kleingeld 2007: 584) or as true regardless of the "differences between the mere empirical characteristics of humans" (Wolff 2020a; see Wood 2008: 8), they seem to have logical abstraction in mind. It is as though Kant got his moral concept of *Menschheit* by comparing the descriptions of different humans, abstracting from their empirical differences, and finally arriving at what they all have in common. If so, then the Formula of Humanity would indeed be true of all concretely embodied human beings (by the logical rule stated in the preceding paragraph). But this would be a misinterpretation of Kant. His pure moral concepts and principles have *strict universality*, which he distinguishes from mere generality (A843/B871) and connects with necessity and apriority (B3–4). As such, they must be "set forth . . . *in abstracto*" (GMS, 4: 409) and have their "origin completely a priori in reason" (4: 411). They "cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely contingent cognitions," but must be derived "from the universal concept of a rational being as such [*überhaupt*]" (4: 411–12). In the context of the *Groundwork*, this means that the human being is considered merely as a "rational being"—a concept "of pure reason"—in abstraction from "the nature of the human being" and from "the circumstances of the world in which he is placed" (4: 389).

Thus, one cannot reduce Kant's moral universalism to general claims about human beings *in concreto*. It is certainly the case that the supposed racial or any other differences among actual humans do not matter here. But this is not because the Kantian pure moral principles apply to all humans regardless of their contingent differences. It is rather because those principles, taken in themselves, are not concerned with concretely embodied humans at all. In other words, the concept of humanity operative in Kant's pure moral philosophy is at an entirely *different logical plane* than the notion of biological humans that Mills was talking about.[21] Meanwhile, Kant treats

[21] A similar point is made in Marwah 2019: 105–6. For all my disagreement with Mills's interpretation of Kant in this context, we will *end* at a similar place. I will likewise argue that, according to Kant, nonwhites have no agential part to play in realizing the moral vision articulated in the *Groundwork*.

racial characteristics as the effects of nature and therefore as applicable only to humans qua biological beings. There can be no logical contradiction, then, between his strictly universal moral principles and his racial views. There is *no logical comparison* to be made between the two in the first place. The prevailing discourse on Kant and racism, insofar as it hinges on the mistaken assumption of a straightforward contradiction between the two, is therefore on shaky grounds.

## I.4. Locating Kant's Racial Views in His System

To uncover the real connection between Kant's moral philosophy and his racial views, we will have to zoom out and consider his broader philosophical system. We can learn from Kant himself about how to proceed. Here is an instructive passage from "On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice" (1793).

> A sum of rules, even of practical rules, is called *theory* if those rules are thought as principles having a certain universality [*Allgemeinheit*], so that abstraction is made from a multitude of conditions that yet have a necessary influence on their application. Conversely, not every doing is called *practice*, but only that effecting of an end which is thought as the observance of certain principles of procedure represented in their universality [*im Allgemeinen*].
>
> It is obvious that between theory and practice there is required, besides, a middle term [*Mittelglied*] connecting them and providing a transition from one to the other, no matter how complete a theory may be; for, to a concept of the understanding, which contains a rule, must be added an act of judgment by which a practitioner distinguishes whether or not something is a case of the rule. (TP, 8: 275, modified translation)[22]

The problem (as I see it), however, is not that Kant's moral theory itself is in truth limited in scope. Rather, his racist particularism is a feature of his broader philosophical *system*. The need to draw out this systematic entanglement is why I am criticizing Mills's presentation of the supposed contradiction between the literal reading of Kant's moral universalism and racism: this assumption of contradiction has stood in the way of a more thorough, holistic investigation of the latter.

[22] I thank Elvira Basevich and Sarah Holtman for highlighting the significance of Kant's reference to the middle term (*Mittelglied*) linking theory and practice.

There are three key concepts in this passage: a *theory* that sets down certain principles *im Allgemeinen* or, which amounts to the same, *in abstracto* (KpV, 5: 67), a *practice* that realizes the end represented by those principles, and a *middle term* that connects the two. In these terms, we may say that what Kant did in the *Groundwork* was to articulate what he would later call the "moral *final end*" of humanity, which is "assigned by pure reason and comprehend[s] the whole of all ends under one principle" (TP, 8: 279–80n). As Henry Allison has noted, what was articulated was in effect the idea of "a future historical condition in which humanity is governed by moral . . . laws," although Kant might not have thought of it exactly in these terms in the *Groundwork* (2011: 85n36). His next task, then, is to identify the *Mittelglied* that can bridge the pure moral principles and contingent human practices in space and time. In other words, how can what Mills called "biological humans" work their way toward the envisioned moral destiny?

Part of the answer to this question lies in Kant's anthropology and physical geography, the two places where he presents a racialized account of perceived human differences—not only in skin color but also, and more important, in terms of naturally effectuated temperaments, dispositions, and talents. Kant submits that the system of pure morals "needs anthropology for its *application* to human beings" (GMS, 4: 412). The requisite anthropology would investigate "the particular *nature* of human beings." Specifically, it "would deal only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in *fulfilling* the laws of a metaphysics of morals" (MS, 6: 217). Kant assigns this task to pragmatic anthropology, which is concerned with how "the human being, as an animal endowed with the *capacity of reason* (*animal rationabile*), can make out of himself a *rational animal* (*animal rationale*)" in accordance with "the idea of possible rational beings on earth in general [*überhaupt*]" (Anth, 7: 321–22). The human being, so construed, is destined "to live in a society with human beings and in it to *cultivate* himself, to *civilize* himself, and to *moralize* himself by means of the arts and sciences" (7: 324–25).

Logically, the anthropological claims about humanity's moral prospect *as a species* entail nothing about whether all individual humans can participate equally in progressing toward that prospect. To Kant, humanity considered as a species, which constitutes a unified "system," cannot be reduced to a mere "aggregate" of individuals (Anth, 7: 320). So it would be a mistake to claim, as Robert Louden does, that Kant's "belief that the *entire human species* must eventually share in the [moral] destiny of the species" logically commits him

to the view that "*all members* of the species"—including "people of color"—"will be brought into the moral community" as agents (Louden 2000: 105–6, emphasis added). Michael Wolff (2020a) makes a similar mistake by suggesting that Kant's belief in the unity of humanity (monogenism) makes him an antiracist. In truth, Kant emphasizes that, with the human species (unlike any other animal species), its final destiny can at best be reached by the species, not through a sum of all individuals but through indefinitely many generations (IaG, 8: 18–19; Anth, 7: 324, 329–30).

Kant has thereby carved out a capacious *logical space* to exclude entire populations—on account of their racialized characteristics, including aptitudes, cognitive (in)abilities, and so on—from playing any agential role in the continued human progress toward the species-bound moral destiny. On his account, the "red" race of Amerindians cannot even pass the state of nature or "savagery" because they lack the driving force (*Triebfeder*), passions, and other prerequisites of culture; "Negroes" have the sort of passions—for example, fear of beating—that make them trainable, whereby they can acquire the "culture of slaves" but nothing more;[23] the "yellow" race represented by Asiatic Indians have passions, drives, and capacities enough to acquire some culture of art but not sciences, due to their inability to form abstract thoughts. By contrast, Kant claims, the white race alone possesses all the driving forces and talents needed for achieving the most advanced culture and continuing to progress toward the destiny of moralization (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1187; R1520 [1780–89], 15: 877–78).

I will show in Chapter 1 how Kant gathered and communicated data for these racial profiles through teaching physical geography (annually from 1756 onward), before they were taken up in his anthropology (a spinoff from the geography course). I will use Figure I.1 to represent the relations among Kant's pure moral philosophy, pragmatic anthropology, and physical geography.

Figure I.1 presents three *levels of discourse*. I use the downward arrows to suggest that each lower level specifies the conditions of application for the core claims established at the adjacent higher level. They are the conditions that Kant has abstracted from in order to establish the latter claims. Each level operates with a distinct conception of human being. I shall not get into

[23] Unless otherwise noted, I will preserve Kant's use of 'Negro' throughout this book, largely because, as we shall see in Chapter 4, he used it as a technical term referring to human beings from West Africa.

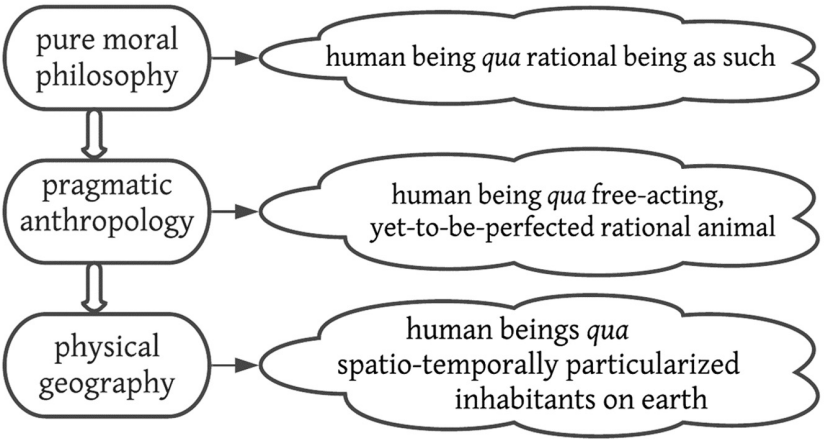



**Figure I.1.** Three levels of discourse.

details here. The main point I want to make now is this: the three levels of discourse correspond to such distinct domains of objects that their propositions cannot be compared with one another logically to support the assumption of contradiction that has defined the prevailing discourse on Kant and racism.

In sum, it is a mistake to think that Kant's moral universalism logically contradicts his racist particularism. By my analysis, he held a *consistent inegalitarian* position through and through, a position that required no cognitive dissonance on his part. That is, he held and taught racist views without having to contradict the supposed core of his moral (or political) philosophy—when the latter is read literally. Those views cannot be simply chalked up to his failure to "think through" his own philosophical commitments (à la Marcus Willaschek). On the contrary, they reflect the enormous complexity of his philosophical *system*.

Specifically, I have mentioned two important facts that make it plausible to believe that Kant must have thought carefully about the relevance of racialized human differences to his moral theory. One is his recognition of the need to establish the *Mittelglied* for connecting theory and practice, by attending to the "multitude of conditions" which the theory has abstracted from in order to present its rules in their universality and which "yet have a necessary influence on their application" (TP, 8: 275). The other fact is Kant's extensive knowledge about and lifelong practice of teaching physical geography, which contains specific descriptions of the various populations inhabiting the Earth. Kant is a pragmatic thinker who finds it necessary to

seek the kind of "historical cognition" (knowledge of facts, to be explained in Chapter 4) that is represented by physical geography (besides empirical history). He must have reflected on how to bring his geographic knowledge—alongside his anthropological account of human nature and the associated teleological conception of history—to bear on his quest for the *Mittelglied* between theory and practice.

Kant's racialization of human differences must figure in such a reflection. After all, given the spherical shape of the Earth and the European nations' de facto expansionism, different human populations will inevitably encounter one another at some point.[24] So far as Kant's geographic knowledge goes, each population will bring to the table a particular kind of aptitude, talent (or lack thereof), way of thinking, and so on that can be attributed to their native environment. Such was the material reality of human beings *in concreto* according to Kant. Considering that he obviously went out of his way to gather as much information about each population as possible, he must have taken such information into account while reflecting on how humanity may approximate its species-bound destiny in an increasingly connected world. I shall explain how he does this—in a racist way—in Chapter 4.

## I.5. Kant's Philosophy and Antiracism

Now we arrive at an evitable question: (how) can Kant's philosophy still be tapped for antiracism? The answer to this question hinges on how one reads Kant's philosophy. There are better and worse readings in this respect. Here is how Lucy Allais makes the distinction.

> Getting it wrong as to where the universalizing, or the abstracting, or the *a priori* moves are happening leads to worse readings of Kant. Readings of Kant have become immeasurably richer as more people have paid attention to the fact that his *a priori* account of the conditions of the possibility of various phenomena are not meant to be complete accounts of the phenomena in question, and that he has concerns with empirical, situated subjects. (2019: 79)

[24] On the significance of the spherical shape of the Earth for Kant's political thinking, see Huseyinzadegan 2019: 137–57.

To this I add that Kant works out his "concerns with empirical, situated subjects" in more or less abstract ways, too. He can view humankind, as he does in pragmatic anthropology and physical geography respectively, either as a *species* that is to reach its moral destiny over indefinitely many generations or as geographically dispersed individuals grouped by *races* and *nations*. To Kant, the understanding of pure morals must be supplemented by both of those viewpoints: to be an effective agent on the world stage, one must learn how to deal with other human beings *in concreto*. Thus, as Mark Larrimore puts it, "Kant did not think you could responsibly do practical philosophy without physical geography and pragmatic anthropology, and wasn't trying to." Otherwise, we "misread his ethics, if we do not also read his accounts of human diversity," for instance. In this way, race has a "possibly constitutive place . . . in Kant's philosophical system" (2008: 362). Much of the exegetical work I will be doing in subsequent chapters is an attempt to clarify what such a "constitutive place" comes down to.

Doing this kind of exegetical work puts us in a better position to address the question of whether Kant's philosophy can still offer valuable insights and tools to the ongoing antiracist struggles. I am not suggesting that his philosophy is indispensable to this end. It is just that, in light of what I said about his role in the formation of modern racist ideology, those of us who consider ourselves "Kant scholars" or "Kantians" share the *burden* to do whatever we can, both as scholars and as educators (if applicable), to help undo racism in its myriad guises. For this purpose, we should keep in mind Kleingeld's caution against "self-incurred *philosophical naiveté* and the unintentional replication of elements of Kant's theories that were developed under the influence of his racism" (2019: 18). Among other things,

> [to the extent that] racism still makes its influence felt in [Kant's] theory by affecting the *articulation of intermediate principles* and the *selection of central problems* to be addressed . . . we should [first] investigate carefully exactly what role it plays in his wider moral and political theory. Only by actually investigating its *systematic role in the larger whole of his practical philosophy* can we assess the importance of Kant's racism (or lack thereof), and determine what (if anything) is needed to eradicate it entirely. (Kleingeld 2007: 584–85, emphasis added)

The italicized phrases in this passage point to a basic task for scholars today, namely to seek a better and deeper understanding of how Kant's racial

views figure in his entire philosophical system. One should do so with curiosity and an open mind, without any preemptive judgment or wish that "Kant's racism can be isolated from the rest of his theory." This proposition, Kleingeld reminds us, can be ascertained (or rejected) only *after* an extensive, thorough, and holistic study of Kant's work (2007: 585).

The study carried out in this book will reveal a nuanced picture of Kant the philosopher-cum-educator, who turns out to have something different to offer to today's antiracist struggles than many have assumed. I will expand on this in the conclusion to the book. For now, I shall highlight one takeaway from my analysis of the relation between Kant's pure moral philosophy and his racial views in the sections I.3 and I.4. If that analysis is correct, then it is misguided to think that, just because Kant's universalist moral principles *do not take into account* racial differences, this makes his moral theory *antiracist* (Wolff 2020a). As I pointed out, Kant's pure moral principles paid no attention to racial differences only because their strict "universality"—in a quintessentially Kantian sense of this term—requires a *total abstraction* from the actual conditions of human existence. The claim that those moral principles, thanks to their putative universality, are on that account antiracist not only misunderstands Kant's philosophy but can also *obstruct* the work of antiracism. The prefix *anti-* in 'antiracism' signifies active struggles against historically rooted and deeply entrenched ways in which a society is organized here and now. Such struggles presuppose an informed understanding of certain injustices *as distinctively racial* injustices, coupled with pragmatic knowledge of how to address them effectively (Kendi 2019). Given that Kant, to ensure the strict universality of the highest moral principles, must abstract from the historical conditions under which human beings live and relate to one another *in concreto*, betting the promise of antiracism on those principles in effect makes race practically *irrelevant*. This "colorblind" approach is dubious and can indeed prevent us from seeing the more meaningful resources that Kant's philosophy may have to offer (Basevich 2020).

The Kant that will emerge from this book is a pragmatic thinker who was well attuned to the social and political realities of his day. To link up theory and practice, he knew that he must *also* be a shrewd observer of complicated dynamics of the world. Among other things, he was attentive to what nonmoral interests—for example, the love of honor and external propriety—secretly if not overtly motivated people in the "civilized" parts of the world (Western Europe). And he evidently paid close attention to the evolving geopolitics at the time. Above all, it was important for him to understand which

nation had enough commercial stakes, military power, and political authority to keep other nations in check through the threats of war. This is because, as he puts it in the "Conflict of Faculties" (1798), he was concerned with the trajectory of "the human race viewed in its entirety . . . as divided into nations and states" (SF, 7: 84). A civil commonwealth secured by a "united might" in accordance with a "united will" is a necessary precondition of humanity's progress toward its moral destiny. The "equilibrium" within such a commonwealth, however, can only be between *reciprocal* effects and counter-effects (IaG, 8: 26; see MAM, 8: 121–22). To put it bluntly, if you have no power (or no autonomy as a polity), you have no seat at the bargaining table—at least not as an agential participant who can negotiate the terms of coexistence. It is therefore no surprise that, as I shall explain in Chapter 1, Kant's final account of the character of nations in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) focuses on just five Western-European nations (France, England, Spain, Italy, and Germany). He thereby conveys the perception of a world in which only those nations were in the position to negotiate with one another and figure out the terms for a peaceful "cosmopolitan" order.[25] This attentiveness to and prioritization of the intra-European order may also explain Kant's later expressions of reservation about the practices of colonialism (Valdez 2017) and slavery (Lu-Adler 2022c).

A natural response to this observation is to criticize Kant for his Eurocentric worldview. Such a criticism is well taken. We can *also* learn a valuable lesson, however, from his political sensitivity and pragmatism. From his pragmatic point of view, a crucial development of practical reason is "worldly prudence" or "the art of . . . how to use human beings for one's purposes" (Päd, 9: 486; see Anth, 7: 201). As Holy Wilson clarifies it, the Kantian prudence is "the ability to gain the willing cooperation of others in our ends" (2011: 169). This ability, Kant submits, is indispensable to the realization of a better future of humanity.

> The human species should and *can* itself be the creator of its good fortune; however, that it *will* do so cannot be inferred a priori from what is known to us about its natural predispositions, but only from experience and history, with expectation as well grounded as is necessary for us not to despair of its progress toward the better, but to promote its approach to this goal with

[25] On how Kant's theory of race affects his cosmopolitanism, which represents the core of his political philosophy, see Hedrick 2008; McCarthy 2009: 42–68; Gani 2017; Huseyinzadegan 2019: 137–57; Basevich 2020; Yab 2021: 189–235.

> all prudence and moral illumination (each to the best of his ability). (Anth, 7: 328–29)

We differ from Kant both in how we (should) conceptualize the "good fortune" to be created and in our respective social realities. Such differences suggest the need for an intentional normative reorientation on our part, whereby we treat antiracism as first and foremost a struggle for *corrective* racial justice (à la Charles Mills). Meanwhile, it remains true that we need to promote our vision of a better future with all *prudence* as well as moral illumination (whatever this means). I will develop these points in the conclusion to the book.

## I.6. About the Title and Plan of This Book

The subtitle of this book is "Views from Somewhere." It indicates an opposition to the idea of objectivity developed in Thomas Nagel's famous book *The View from Nowhere*. Nagel was interested in the question of "how limited beings like ourselves can alter their conception of the world so that it is no longer just the view from where they are but in a sense a view from nowhere," whereby we can acquire "objective knowledge" of the world as it is (1986: 70). I do not wish to dispute Nagel's philosophical claims about mind, world, and knowledge here. I am mainly concerned about how the view-from-nowhere idea of objectivity, as journalist Lewis Raven Wallace argues in the context of critiquing its hold on journalism, can (inadvertently) serve to silence already marginalized perspectives. In journalism, choices about which topics to cover, which sources to trust, which facts to include, and so on are always made from a *standpoint* that reflects, self-consciously or not, the journalist's own lived experiences, which are in turn shaped by their race, gender, class, and so on. It is important not to pretend otherwise, but to shine light on and be reflective about the standpoints. And it is urgent to validate reports from historically oppressed or neglected perspectives (by black queer journalists for instance), if journalism shares the society's burden to confront institutional racism and other forms of injustice (Wallace 2019). In what follows, I will briefly explain how analogous points can be made about the study of Kant's relation to racism. I will tease out four ways in which the notion of "view from somewhere" informs my study in this book. This will also allow me to introduce the tripartite structure of the body of book plus a forward-looking conclusion.

Part I of the book, "Reframing the Discourse," examines the perspective from which scholars have argued about Kant's relation to racism over the last couple of decades. As I have explained, the dominant perspective has two features. One is the assumption of a logical contradiction between the core theses of Kant's pure moral philosophy and his racist views. The other is an individualistic approach that revolves around the question of whether, to what extent, or for how long Kant was racist. In Chapters 1 and 2, I will further explain how these have shaped and constrained the prevailing discourse on Kant and racism. We will also see in Chapter 2 that most scholars involved in the debate, with the exception of Charles Mills, take for granted the idea of "racism" as a morally condemnatory accusation that implies judgments about certain moral failures on the part of racist individuals. This fact may reflect how the scholars themselves are positioned in a given society, how their society approaches its own history of racism, what its general public tend to associate with "racism," and so on (I will return to this point at the end of this section).

Part II of the book, "Seeing 'Race,'" investigates the standpoint from which Kant studied human variations and eventually arrived at a classificatory system reducing all humans to four principal races. My methodology is similar to how Bertrand Russell does history of philosophy, namely to exhibit the philosopher under investigation "as an outcome of his *milieu*, a man in whom were crystallized and concentrated thoughts and feelings which, in a vague and diffused form, were common to the community of which he was a part" (2004: x–xi). In Kant's case, I hasten to add, it is equally important to consider what he might have absorbed from his milieu *and* what he gave back in return. His own distinction between historical and philosophical cognitions, both of which he values, can help to illuminate this reciprocal relation. One can have historical cognition only a posterior, either directly through one's own experience or indirectly through other people's testimonies (including travel reports). Empirical history and physical geography are paradigmatic examples of this kind of cognition. By contrast, one has philosophical cognition of something only when one knows it "*ex principiis*, which has been drawn from grounds *a priori*" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 797).

In these terms, two factors defined the standpoint from which Kant theorized about race. First, as I shall explain in Chapter 4, there had been a somewhat coordinated global data gathering that resulted in a massive inventory of cross-checkable reports about the extra-European world, including reports about its human inhabitants. This explosion of data was

the backdrop against which Kant became interested in designing a physical geography course and taught it for decades. It also presented him with an intriguing phenomenon: the remarkable variations within a single human species. Second, as a philosopher who wanted to understand such variations by uncovering their cause, Kant would bring his prior philosophical commitments to bear. Insofar as he saw human variations as a *natural* phenomenon, the relevant commitments are those of a *Naturforscher* (investigator of nature).

Chapter 3 foregrounds these commitments. I will highlight the fact that Kant, from early on in his career, was intrigued by the (re)production of organic beings, especially when certain features appear hereditary. Reports about human variations presented Kant with a perfect example. What explains, in particular, the observation that the "Negroes" who had been transported from their tropical motherland to the New World colonies (for example, Virginia), without breeding with other populations, always produced offspring with the same black skin? In a way, Kant treated this perceived heredity of skin color as the litmus test for the adequacy of any theory that had been proposed to explain organic productions. Can it be explained in purely mechanical terms? Or does one have to posit a final cause? Kant's own theory, a version of "epigenesis," is a sophisticated combination of both mechanical and final causes. According to this theory, there were certain germs (*Keime*) and natural predispositions (*Anlagen*) in the single original phylum (*Stamm*) of the human species; these, which constitute the final cause, prepared the human species to survive in any given climate. As the most ancient human populations had to preserve themselves in four radically different *climates* over long periods of time, they developed certain adaptive features in accordance with the laws of nature. Some of these features became persistently hereditary through subsequent migrations. So far as Kant could tell, skin color was the only such feature that could establish a "race." He thereby arrived at his fourfold classification of human races, in accordance with his division of four climate zones.

As a methodic thinker, Kant was quick to recognize—so were his critics quick to point out—that this explanation raised all sorts of thorny philosophical and meta-philosophical questions. For instance, what is the nature of his supposition of original germs and natural predispositions? Is it an objective claim about how the world is in itself? Is it a hypothesis that can be tested empirically? How else is he warranted to use it? It would take a lot of ingenious conceptual maneuvers for Kant to answer such questions.

It was no accident that he published not one but three essays on race (1775/77, 1785, 1788), with an increasing attention to methodology and such metaphilosophical questions as the relation between metaphysics and physics. As Inder Marwah puts it, if Kant's interest in race was "rooted in the 1750s–1760s" and "systematized in the 1770s," it would become "entrenched in the 1780s" (2019: 105). In the process, he would incorporate some of his signature philosophical moves to shore up his theory, especially his account of the role of reason in guiding the *Naturforscher*'s study of nature.

My analysis of Kant's theorizing of race from the standpoint of a rational *Naturforscher* leads to a worrisome observation. He was aware that, in some cases, opinions about a given subject can carry such high practical *stakes* that one must be very cautious in venturing judgments about it. At the same time, he also thought that one need not be so cautious with purely theoretical judgments. By insisting on explaining human variations from the standpoint of a *Naturforscher* who abides by none other than the demands of a speculative (theoretical) reason, then, was Kant either willfully indifferent to or simply naïve about the practical stakes of his racial classification? After all, at a time when race-based chattel slavery was a well-known fact, a racial theory like Kant's, which treats certain characteristics as irreversibly hereditary, can provide a potent framework for legitimizing the de facto world order of racial hegemony.

I will bring this observation into sharp relief in Chapter 4, where I situate the development of Kant's racial views in the larger context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We cannot fully grasp the originality, significance, or power of Kant's racial theory unless we read it as part of the broader system of data and knowledge production around the topic of human variations during those two centuries. I will begin by explaining the roles natural philosophers before Kant played in that system. On the one hand, in the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and fellows of the Royal Society of London, which was established in the Baconian spirit (1660), literally crafted guidelines for the European agents overseas to collect usable data for compiling a comprehensive "natural history." The Baconian plan for such a history, insofar it must describe everything on earth, included a detailed list of topics about the human inhabitants around the world. Skin color soon entered the list and gained prominence as a subject of philosophical curiosity.

On the other hand, no amount of data collected on such topics could on their own lead to a modern theory of race, whereby the perceived human

variations would be biologized. For this racialization to get off the ground, there must also be a paradigm shift in the Western philosophical outlook. I will focus on two original contributors to the requisite shift. One was Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), who made the radical move of treating humans as part of the animal kingdom and hence *as natural products*. This paved the way for a study of human variations that accorded with the Newtonian model of science: the naturalized phenomenon of human variations must now be explained in terms of the same natural laws and mechanisms that are applicable to *animals in general*. Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–88) pioneered such an explanatory project. And Kant, from the standpoint of a rationalist *Naturforscher*, would develop an incontrovertibly modern scientific theory of race through a critical engagement with Buffon's work as well as Linnaeus's.

For the sake of argument, I will tease apart two aspects of Kant's raciology. One consists in a racial-classificatory system that divides all humans into four principal races, together with an attempt to explain the division in scientific terms. This is the primary focus of Kant's three essays on race. The other is a theory that links certain racialized characteristics—beyond skin color—to racially unequal practical outcomes. The latter theory has to be constructed out of the materials from Kant's anthropology, physical geography, and philosophy of history. I will try to shed some light on the intricate relation between both aspects of Kant's raciology through a case study of how he racialized the "Negro" characteristics and, on that basis, conceptualized their place in a teleologically oriented human history. This case study will suggest a striking answer to the question I raised above, namely whether Kant was willfully indifferent to or simply naïve about the practical stakes of his speculative racial theory. The answer is that he could, in a clear-eyed manner, think the following: although race-based chattel slavery is morally wrong in itself, it is an inevitable chapter in the civilizational phase of human history.

The Kant who could think this way did not have to have any malice in his heart. Rather, as a philosopher who treated apathy as a duty (Denis 2000; Formosa 2011), he might be trying to look at humanity from the perspective of an apathetic observer. In his own words, as a disinterested "philosopher" who "regard[ed] human beings and their play in the large," he sought to "discover an *aim of nature* in this nonsensical course of things human" (IaG, 8: 18). In this regard, Kant used as his principle something that "does not depend on our choice but on a higher purpose for the human race." The object

of his attention, then, was "not what we *make* our end, but what *nature's end* was." Thus, whatever might appear to be "the foolishness of human beings," Kant could see it as the means serving "nature's purpose" for the human species, who must develop culture and civilization on route to its final (moral) destiny (Anth, 7: 305–6). Kant was thereby self-consciously guided by reason and reason alone.

This single-minded adherence to the dictates of reason came with a regrettable byproduct, namely a cold indifference to the atrocities suffered by human beings *in concreto*. To quote Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

> It is reason that . . . turns man back upon himself; reason that separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him: It is Philosophy that isolates him; by means of Philosophy he secretly says, at the sight of a suffering man, perish if you wish, I am safe. Only dangers that threaten the entire society still disturb the Philosopher's tranquil slumber, and rouse him from his bed. (2018: 157)

So we should not be surprised when we see Kant speculating calmly about the eventual perishing of Amerindians (due to their supposed lack of life force) or about the suitability of "Negroes" for slavery (thanks to their alleged fear of beating and robust physique). As we read him systematically and contextually, we will recognize that such speculations are the proverbial feature, not bug, of his *way of philosophizing*. Here is Kant speaking to this point from his lectern.

> Philosophy likewise strives to restrain the affects as much as possible and to root them out. Hence really learned people, and philosophers, . . . weigh everything that they take as *objectum* of their considerations cold-bloodedly, that is, with calm mind[;] furthermore, they carefully consider in everything one side as well as the other, and in this way they arrive best, most easily, and most certainly at a proper cognition of the true. (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 163)

Granted, Kant's belated criticism of some European countries' colonial practices might suggest a disturbance to his previous tranquility about the treatment of Amerindians and "Negro" slaves, for instance. What appeared to be really disturbing him, however, was the recognition that those practices could undermine the prospect of a lasting *intra-European peace* (Valdez

2017; Lu-Adler 2022c). Thus, to echo Rousseau, only what threatened the entire (European) society—not moral concerns about the oppressed "races"—could disquiet Kant's calm philosophical mind.

Looking beyond Kant's eighteenth century, I will then explore some ways in which the products of philosophical speculation could have lasting ramifications. This will be the focus of Part III of the book, "A Worldview Transformed by 'Race.'" It points to the third way in which I am talking about the "view from somewhere": the modern invention of "race" profoundly transformed how people in the West came to see and relate to one another, including themselves, regardless of whether they have a meta-awareness of the racialized viewpoint itself. Chapter 5 has a suggestive title, "What Is Seen Cannot Be Unseen." It centers around two German novellas published in the early nineteenth century, both of which concern how one perceives oneself and others through the racial lens, sometimes with tragic consequences. A Kant, in whose opinion abstracting either too much or too little can make one unhappy in society, may simply advise that one ignore racialized (self-) perceptions if they get in the way of beneficial social interactions. My analysis will show that this kind of advice would only betray ignorance about how racialized (self-)perceptions actually work. There is no looking away, at least not in a world characterized by de facto and occasionally de jure forms of racial injustices and alienations. Inspired by the literature on social and ideological functions of race concepts and racial identities, which can be emancipatory as well as oppressive, I will examine how to live well with racialized (self-) perceptions.

Chapter 6 studies how Kant's raciology played a role in transforming "history of philosophy." One result of this transformation is a Western-Eurocentric curriculum that still dominates higher education today, although the racial thinking behind Kant's initial argument has faded from our view. I already sketched the racial dimension of Kant's argument for the Greek origin of philosophy in section I.2, while objecting to Allen Wood's claim that Kant, being a long dead man, has no power over us. Let me reiterate: when we talk about Kant's relation to racism, it is not only about what he said but also about how he was positioned in a historically extended network of *power* relations. He had the intellectual might to develop a raciology in the name of science, to decide what counts as "philosophy" and what does not, and to argue with every conceptual tool he had for the Greek origin of "true philosophy." The more potent form of power he had, however, was that he was so well positioned that those products of his intellect could reverberate through

other social actors and thereby continue to shape attitudes, narratives, and institutional practices to this day. The easiest antiracist work professional philosophers can and must do today, I submit, is to undo the Kantian legacy of a racially exclusionary history of philosophy.

Last but not least, my overall approach in this book reflects my own values, beliefs, and lived experiences as a Kant scholar, a professor, and a woman of Chinese descent. As a scholar, I consider it my professional duty to conduct a rigorous and thorough investigation of Kant's raciology and to explain to fellow scholars why they should pay closer attention to this topic in their own work. As a professor, I believe that one's syllabus and/or pedagogy must reflect concerns about the most pressing challenges of one's society and that what and/or how one teaches can have a transformative albeit often subtle impact on a student's worldview. These beliefs explain why I emphasize Kant's role as a lifelong educator and why I end the book with concrete suggestions about how one can help to transform racist culture through teaching. At the same time, I am a Chinese who was raised with a blend of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, the core values of which include harmony, fortitude, and radical compassion for all (including oneself). This upbringing, plus the fact that I have had to learn how to live well in a society with a long history of anti-Chinese racism, partly explains why I focus on trying to *understand* Kant's role in the formation of modern racist ideology without judging him in moralistic terms. For those of us who belong in the so-called races that are repeatedly denigrated in Kant's works, calling him a "racist"—a term that suffers from moral overload when it is directed at individuals—or moralizing the discourse about his relation to racism would not make us feel any more dignified or empowered.[26] Only *truth* (understanding) and a compassionate, solution-oriented, and radically hopeful *reconciliation*—through active participations in concrete antiracist work, for example—can lift us. Hence my forward-looking conclusion.

[26] One should still feel free to pass moral judgments about Kant in light of his racist views. It is just that, in doing so, one should also honestly reflect on what one wishes to accomplish with those judgments.

# PART I

# REFRAMING THE DISCOURSE

# 1

# Where Is the "Contradiction"?

## Reconsidering the Place of Race in Kant's System

### 1.1. Introduction

How should we understand the relation between Kant's views on race and his philosophical system as a whole? The scholarship on this subject over the last couple of decades is shaped by two claims.

The first claim is that racism logically contradicts the best known and most treasured part of Kant's system, his moral philosophy. This "contradiction thesis," as I call it, goes roughly as follows: on the one hand, Kant taught—if we take his words literally—that *all* humans deserve respect on account of their humanity ("moral universalism"); on the other hand, he practically withheld this respect from *some* humans due to their race ("racist particularism"). Charles Mills has shed the most glaring light on this alleged contradiction and used it to argue that Kant's moral philosophy is in truth not universalist. Most Kant scholars accept Mills's claim about a literal contradiction, but they choose to bite the bullet so as to preserve the core of Kant's moral philosophy while treating his racism as a lamentable but hermeneutically irrelevant personal prejudice.

The second influential claim is from Pauline Kleingeld's "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race" (2007), according to which Kant changed his mind about race in the mid-1790s by abandoning the hierarchical view of the races ("racial hierarchism") in favor of a more egalitarian one. To prepare the conceptual ground for this proposition, Kleingeld gives an overview of the representative literature on Kant's racism. Like Mills, Kleingeld assumes that racism, understood as racial hierarchism, contradicts Kant's moral universalism (and political egalitarianism). Thus, until he purportedly stopped being a racist in the mid-1790s, Kant must be either a consistent but *inegalitarian* philosopher or a universalist but *inconsistent* one. Kleingeld favors the latter interpretation, which then allows her to argue that Kant eventually became a *more consistent* universalist.

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The arguments by Mills and Kleingeld, among many others, have raised a host of basic questions. For instance, how should we understand 'racism' if we are to have a meaningful conversation about Kant's views on race? An answer to this question, which has received surprisingly little attention, will in turn affect how we approach other questions: what would it take for Kant, so late in his life, to reverse his racist position? Or is that even the right question to ask? And what, if any, resources can his philosophy still offer to the anti-racist work today? I will take up these questions in later chapters. The present chapter focuses on this question: do Kant's racist claims about nonwhites, whatever one means by 'racist,' really contradict his purported moral universalism? My answer will be "no": the universality of Kant's moral claims, if properly understood, is perfectly consistent with racist claims, as his philosophical *system* is capacious enough to accommodate both.

To reach this conclusion, I proceed as follows. I begin with a brief literature review that revolves around Kleingeld's 2007 article, to show how she and her critics alike take the contradiction thesis for granted (section 1.2). I then explain how this thesis builds on two faulty assumptions. First, the *universality* of Kant's pure moral claims, which strictly pertain to humans qua rational beings *in abstracto*, is conflated with their *generalizability* to all human beings *in concreto* or what Mills (2014) calls "biological humans." This move, I argue, betrays a misunderstanding of Kant's pure moral philosophy. Second, even if, à la Robert Louden (2000), the universality of Kant's ethics comes down to his belief that the *entire human species* must eventually reach its destined moral perfection, he is not thereby logically committed—Louden claims he is—to the view that *all individuals* must play an equitable role in humanity's progress toward such a destiny. After all, Kant makes it explicit that humanity can reach its moral destiny at best *as a species*, where 'species' refers to an indefinite, historically progressing series of generations,[1] not an aggregative sum of coexisting individual humans. This distinction between species and individuals gives Kant ample space to exclude all nonwhite races from agential participations in human progress, without contradicting any of his core moral claims (section 1.3).

To further confirm that there is no contradiction between racism and Kant's stated moral universalism, I then proceed with a positive account of where to locate Kant's views on race ("raciology" for short) in his philosophical system (sections 1.4 and 1.5). Part of my thesis is that physical geography

[1] On this conception of humanity as a "historical species," see Frierson 2013: 81–88.

is a primary location where Kant develops his basic account of racial differences. What about the fact, one may ask, that he *also* talks about race in his pragmatic anthropology? Louden (2000) has suggested that ultimately it may not be all that important whether we place race in one versus the other. I disagree. Kant's raciology is multifaceted. It will prove philosophically consequential—and fair to Kant—to get a clear sense of how different aspects thereof interact with different parts of his enormously complex system.

For the sake of argument, I separate Kant's raciology into *racialist* and *racist* parts (this is inspired by the distinction between racialism and racism in Appiah [1989], to be discussed in Chapter 2). Racialism divides the human species into various races and assigns a distinct set of hereditary traits and dispositions to each race. So construed, racialism is not yet racist. It can nevertheless have a *racist upshot* when used as the basis to *exclude* groups of people—on account of their racialized attributes—from such goods as education, civic participation, and eligibility to engage in a collective striving toward moral excellence (I shall further explain this characterization of racism in Chapter 2). In these terms, we may say that physical geography is a primary locus of Kant's racialism (section 1.4.1).[2] If this part of Kant's raciology is not yet racist, he often gives it racist upshot by connecting some of its claims—for example, the claim that Amerindians have no passions and few needs—with relevant propositions of anthropology, such as the proposition that human beings can be cultivated and civilized only if they have certain passions and needs (section 1.4.2).

At the same time, the chief task of Kant's pragmatic anthropology is still to explain what "the human being" (qua species)—as the only earthbound creature with rational capacities—can freely make of himself.[3] I will explain how Kant can reconcile this racially neutral anthropologic account of humanity with his racist view that, all things considered, only the Western or "Occidental" whites can play agential roles in humanity's progress toward its moral destiny. Overall, Kant's philosophical system has such a complex structure that it can coherently include all of the following: strictly universal claims

[2] I call physical geography "a primary locus" of Kant's racialism partly because in the present chapter my main concern is to clarify how geography, anthropology, and Kant's pure moral philosophy relate to one another on the issue of race. In Chapters 3 and 4, we shall see that Kant's racialism actually belongs in the broader domain of his theoretical philosophy.

[3] As a historian explicating Kant's views, I will retain his practice of using male pronouns to talk about "the human being" in order not to paper over his sexism. For discussion, see Kleingeld 1993. Similarly, I will retain Kant's practice of referring to nonwhites and non-Westerners by such terms as 'Negro,' 'Oriental,' and 'savage.' A reader today may find these offensive. If so, may that feeling be an impetus for further inquiry.

about human beings as mere rational beings in his pure moral philosophy, still somewhat abstract claims about the moral prospect of humanity as an earthbound animal species with rational capacities in his pragmatic anthropology, racialist but not yet racist claims about different human populations in physical geography, and racist claims about who can or cannot participate as agents in the historical unfolding of his moral vision for the human species (sections 1.4 and 1.5).

## 1.2. Arguing from an Assumed Contradiction: A Literature Review

There is a common thread in the major arguments that have been made about Kant's views on race: they tend to operate on the explicit or implicit assumption that racism and moral universalism logically contradict each other. In this section, I give a partial literature review to substantiate this observation. I use Pauline Kleingeld's paper "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race" (2007) as the starter, primarily because it represents a turning point in the debate over Kant's relation to racism. Both its terminology and its thesis that Kant belatedly abandoned racism in favor of racial egalitarianism (reiterated in Kleingeld 2019 and 2021) seem to have a steadfast hold on the ongoing discourse about Kant and racism (as I explained in the Introduction to this book). It is crucial to free scholarship from this hold, if we are to take the discourse in a more fruitful direction.

On Kleingeld's reading, Kant's raciology has two distinct parts. One is a "*bona fide* physiological concept" of "race as a biological category," which defines 'race' simply in terms of "heritable differences in physical appearance." The other is "a hierarchical account according to which the races *also* vary greatly in their capacities for agency and their powers of intellect." This hierarchy of races, with whites at the top and red-skinned Amerindians at the bottom, comes with "the associated 'moral characterization'" of each race. This moralized "racial hierarchism," according to Kleingeld, defines Kant's "racism" (2007: 574–75). Thus, Kant would count as having retracted his racism if he came to "give up entirely the hierarchy of the races, even while retaining the notion of race as a purely physiological concept" (2007: 592).

Insofar as Kant expressed racist views until at least 1788, in the essay "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy" (the last of his dedicated essays on race), there is a prima facie exegetical challenge here. After

all, the 1780s also saw Kant articulating the universalist tenets of his core moral philosophy in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Kleingeld frames the challenge as follows. In those two works, Kant formulated the basic moral principle—the Categorical Imperative—in a way that is literally "addressed to all humans";[4] one can draw a "presumption of human equality" from that principle; but Kant's racial hierarchism "goes against" this presumption. We are therefore confronted with a choice: should we focus on Kant's core moral theory while "abstracting from his racist attitudes"? Or should we reinterpret his moral theory as inegalitarian, to be consistent with his racial hierarchism? In these terms, Kleingeld divides commentators into the camps that see Kant as an "inconsistent universalist" and as a "consistent inegalitarian," respectively. The first camp includes Robert Louden (2000), Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill (2001), and Thomas McCarthy (2004) among others, who hold that the moral theory Kant developed during the 1780s is at its core truly universalist, even though he contradicted it with his racial hierarchism. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1995), Mark Larrimore (1999), Robert Bernasconi (2001, 2002), and Charles Mills (2005) are assigned to the second camp, as they "highlight Kant's white supremacist comments, and argue that his moral theory is less than universalist" (Kleingeld 2007: 574–75).[5]

Kleingeld then faults both camps for assuming that Kant's position on race remained constant during the critical period.[6] On her reading, Kant was certainly an inconsistent universalist until at least the end of the 1780s, as he "simultaneously defended a universalist moral theory and a racial hierarchy" (2007: 575). He "radically revised his views on race during the 1790s," however, as one can infer from his condemnations of colonialism and slavery in "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795) and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

[4] Kant gives several formulations of the Categorical Imperative in the second part of the *Groundwork* (for a detailed analysis, see Allison 2011: 149–269). He states that there are three basic formulas (GMS 4: 436–37). Commentators have argued over how many formulas there *must* be (see Allison 2011: 150n3 for a brief overview of the controversy). They all agree, however, that the Formula of Humanity is one of them: "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (4: 429). This formula, as I explained in the Introduction to this book, is what most commentators have in mind when they claim that racism contradicts Kant's moral universalism.

[5] For alternative literature reviews, see Mikkelsen 2013: 3–18; Marwah 2019: 105–7 (followed by a brief but particularly insightful account of the "moral gravity" of Kant's mature theory of race from the 1780s); Yab 2021: 19–29.

[6] The critical period of Kant's philosophy officially began with the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). When I talk about his "critical philosophy," I am referring to the philosophical work he produced from the 1780s onward.

In this way, Kleingeld concludes, Kant "finally resolved" the earlier contradiction between "his disturbing views on race [and] his own moral universalism." That is, he abandoned racism and became a consistent universalist in the mid-1790s (2007: 582–92).[7]

I now consider two lines of response to Kleingeld's argument.[8] The first response concerns how to interpret Kant's views on colonialism and/or slavery and their relevance to his raciology. According to Kleingeld, the later Kant (after 1792), in stark contrast with his earlier failure to condemn colonialism and slavery, "explicitly prohibits the colonial conquest of foreign lands" and "categorically and repeatedly condemns chattel slavery" because such practices violate the "cosmopolitan right" of the colonized and the enslaved; this suggests that he has jettisoned his former belief in racial hierarchism and become "more egalitarian with regard to race" (2007: 586–88).

Robert Bernasconi counters that, although Kant "did appear to modify his views on the slave trade" and his "particular brand of cosmopolitanism does have implications for how he saw slavery," these do "not mark a radical transformation in his view of race as such" (2011: 292). Rather, by all appearances the later Kant maintained both aspects of his raciology that Kleingeld mentioned. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), he begins the section "On the Character of Races" by recommending Christoph Girtanner's treatise on natural history, *Über das Kantische Prinzip für die Naturgeschichte* (1796), to spare himself the need to elaborate on the subject.

> With regard to this subject I can refer to what Herr Privy Councilor Girtanner has presented so beautifully and thoroughly in explanation and further development in his work (in accordance with my principles). (Anth, 7: 320)[9]

[7] According to Muthu 2003 (181–84), Kant's change of mind occurred even sooner: it was in the mid-1780s that he abandoned, at least in published writings, not only racism (construed as racial hierarchism) but also his racial account of human diversity. On a textually based critique of this interpretation (along with Kleingeld's), see Bernasconi 2011: 300–301.

[8] I do not intend to give an exhaustive analysis of all the critical responses to Kleingeld's account here. Other noteworthy responses that are not exactly captured by my analysis include Basevich 2020 (228–33) and Yab 2021 (51–57, 135–44, 197–207, 214–19), both of which criticize Kleingeld for failing to recognize, among other things, that Kant's theory of race continued to have pragmatic significance for his later cosmopolitan project.

[9] Although Kant says little about race directly in the *Anthropology*, Jimmy Yab has argued that this text in fact represents the "completion" of his theory of race (2021: 27). This is because Yab interprets Kant's theory of race in light of his theory of "character," which is a pivotal notion in the *Anthropology* (2021: 135–87).

The entire Section 1 of Part II of Girtanner's book, which takes up a little over half of the book (1796: 57–285), is on the subject of human races (*Menschenrassen*).[10] Meanwhile, all three of Kant's essays on race—"Of the Different Races of Human Beings" (1775/77), "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race" (1785), and "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy" (1788)—were republished numerous times from 1793 through 1799. In particular, the last reprint of the 1788 essay during Kant's lifetime (1799) retains, *verbatim*, all of the original denigrating claims about "Negroes" and Amerindians (GTP, 8: 174–76). Girtanner made similar claims as well (1796: 138–39, 156–57). These facts suggest that Kant neither abandoned race as a biological category nor retracted his explicitly racist views (Bernasconi 2011: 300; see Larrimore 2008: 358). At the very least, as Robert Louden puts it, one should be "more circumspect [than Kleingeld was] in making any pronouncements about Kant's second thoughts on race"; after all, "nowhere in either his published or unpublished works of the 1790s does he issue any sort of explicit mea culpa or acknowledge to readers that he has changed his mind about race" (Louden 2011: 134).

As for colonialism and slavery, Bernasconi contends that, while Kant did come to modify his position about how they were practiced, such modifications do not amount to a fundamental reversal of his racist views. Take slavery, for example. There is a crucial distinction between the slave trade and the institution of slavery to begin with. Although Kant later expressed some qualms about the former, he mostly remained indifferent toward the latter. Moreover, had he condemned slavery as an institution, this still would not entail a newfound endorsement of racial egalitarianism. After all, as history can testify with countless examples, one can be against slavery while maintaining, for instance, that blacks are intellectually and morally inferior. In fact, when Kant invoked the cosmopolitan law of hospitality to question the slave trade, he did so more in view of its impact on commerce

[10] The Preface and Part I of Girtanner's book are translated in Mikkelsen 2013: 209–32. In these parts of the book, Girtanner articulates the "principles" (*Grundsätze*) that Kant was likely referring to in the *Anthropology*. Girtanner explicates and defends these Kantian principles—as normative constraints on any investigator of nature (*Naturforscher*) who studies organic beings—by synthesizing Kant's three race essays and the relevant parts of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will discuss these principles and the significance of the reference to "Naturforscher." For now, I want to highlight the fact that Girtanner mostly uses examples of human races, especially blacks and whites, to illustrate the basic points regarding "race," on the assumption that "color . . . constitutes the primary characteristic sign of the race in a large number of organic bodies." Girtanner takes himself to be strictly following Kant's own practice in this regard (Mikkelsen 2013: 226–28). On Girtanner's reconstruction of Kant's theory of race, see Sloan 1979: 137–42; Lenoir 1980: 96–99; Querner 1990; Zammito 2012: 127–29; Gambarotto 2018: 65–72.

than out of concerns for the traded African slaves. This sort of objection to the slave trade was far from an abandonment of racism (Bernasconi 2011: 301–6; see Marwah 2019: 106–7; Lu-Adler 2022c). Likewise, as Inés Valdez (2017) has argued more recently, Kant can belatedly adopt anticolonialism without retracting his belief about the Europeans' racial and civilizational superiority: his criticisms of colonialism—of the intra-European conflict and violence in overseas colonies, to be specific—do not suggest an appreciation for racial egalitarianism; rather, reading those criticisms against the backdrop of how colonialism was practiced toward the end of the eighteenth century, we can see that they come mainly from Kant's concerns about its backlash *on Europe*, with potentially detrimental effects on the *European* civilization and moral progress.

The second line of response to Kleingeld's argument goes as follows: whether Kant reversed his racist stance in the 1790s is beside the point; even if we can ascertain such a reversion, there is little solace to draw from it; after all, we are still left with the uncomfortable fact that Kant wrote and taught blatantly racist views during the 1780s, the period that saw the publication of his *Groundwork*, which established the Categorical Imperative as the hallmark of Kantian morality, as well as all three *Critique*s (of pure reason, of practical reason, and of the power of judgment). As Bernasconi puts it,

> to the extent that Kleingeld allows the contradiction between the universal moral theory and the racism to provide the motivation for [Kant's] alleged abandonment of his hierarchical conception of race this interpretation merely highlights the puzzle without resolving it. (2011: 292)

Thus, one may respond to Kleingeld's second-thoughts narrative by redirecting our attention to the perceived contradiction in Kant's original thoughts during the 1780s (the puzzle that Bernasconi was referring to).

Charles Mills represents the most forceful voice in this regard. Nothing can resolve the original puzzle, he contends, than "a radical revision of the scholarship of recent decades" with the admission that Kant, "for most of his professional life, was a racist and a supporter of slavery and colonialism" (2014: 149). Specifically, one must recognize that the "*seemingly* universalist egalitarian ethico-political pronouncements in Kant were *not really* intended to be universalist at all," but were "tacitly referencing white humans (the 'real' humans)." Otherwise, a genuinely universalist reading of Kant's work would

presuppose an astonishing degree of "cognitive dissonance" on his part (2014: 144–45, emphasis added). Among other things, he would have to hold the following beliefs at the same time.

> *Unqualified Universalism*: All biological humans, including all of the races, are normatively equally human/full persons.
>
> *Racist Particularism*: The races of blacks and Native Americans are natural slaves.
>
> *Unqualified Universalism*: All biological humans/all races, as full persons, must be treated as ends, never as mere means.
>
> *Racist Particularism*: The races of blacks and Native Americans may be colonized and enslaved. (2014: 146)

The contradiction in each of these pairs of universalist and racist-particularist propositions is so "flagrant," Mills contends, that it "would have been noticed by anyone of the most minimal intelligence, let alone one of the smartest minds." It is far more plausible, then, to limit the scope of Kant's moral claims: his superficially universalist moral claims are "really meant to apply fully only to those biological humans who are normatively human, the full persons" (2014: 146). Meanwhile, he sees blacks and Native Americans as *Untermenschen* or subpersons, who "do not attain the threshold of normative equality, and so merit differential treatment," including enslavement (2014: 140; see Mills 2005; 2018: 10).

In sum, Mills rejects what he takes to be a literal, unrestricted reading of Kant's stated moral universalism and interprets the real Kant as a consistent inegalitarian who subscribes to racist particularism. Thus, Mills arrives at the view that there is *no real contradiction* between Kant's racism and his moral theory by way of rejecting one side of what he takes to be a *superficial contradiction* between the two. The following syllogism roughly captures the structure of this reasoning.

(1) If one reads Kant's stated moral universalism as unrestricted (namely, as generalizable to all biological humans) while agreeing that he subscribes to racist particularism, then one is attributing a flagrant contradiction to him.
(2) One should not attribute such a contradiction to someone like Kant.

Therefore, one should reject the unrestricted reading of Kant's stated moral universalism.

Most scholars who are interested in sorting out the relation between Kant's racism and his practical philosophy tend to accept premise (1) but deny Mills's conclusion by rejecting (2). Lucy Allais is a prominent example of this approach.

Allais agrees with Mills that, regardless of whether the later Kant changed his mind, his earlier "failure to condemn slavery [for example] is striking and noteworthy" and that this failure suffices to put pressure on interpretations of his "central critical works" such as the *Groundwork*. Contrary to Mills, however, Allais sees no absurdity in reading Kant as an inconsistent universalist. She accepts "the dramatic and important inconsistency this requires ascribing to Kant," but argues that we can totally make sense of how he "failed to see" the inconsistency. Kant's own critical practical philosophy (especially his moral psychology), Allais argues, contains helpful material for understanding not only his racism and his failings in not registering its incompatibility with his moral and political theories but also racism more generally and even our own failure to recognize how we may be implicated in today's racism (2016: 5, 7–8). Allais takes the operative Kantian psychological mechanism to be "moralized self-deception," which is likely to arise "if you live in a world in which you are seriously implicated in current and historical injustice": to avoid moral despair in such circumstances, we are hard pressed to maintain a view of ourselves as still "basically good"; thus, we not only "fail to pay attention to ways in which we are implicated in the suffering of others" but also have "a psychological need to form attitudes, patterns of interpretation and moral salience that dehumanize those who our ways of life fail to respect"—that is, to adopt "delusional ideologies" (2016: 27–30; see Allais 2019: 80–81).

In this attempt to uncover the psychological mechanism of a putatively racist mind, Allais follows Mills and Kleingeld in assuming that racism straightforwardly contradicts Kant's universalist moral theory if this is read literally.[11] We will take a closer look at this assumption next. Once we have

[11] One may find it odd that I am grouping Mills together with Allais and Kleingeld in this analysis. After all, he and I seem to be in the same camp, as I share his conclusion *that*, by the final analysis, there is no real contradiction between Kant's moral theory and his racist views. The difference in *how* we arrive at this conclusion will turn out to matter a lot, however. Whereas Mills puts all the pressure on Kant's moral theory and calls for its radical revision, I leave the literal meaning of this theory intact and draw attention to other parts of Kant's *larger philosophical system* to connect the dots. The result is not only a richer and exegetically more faithful reading of Kant but also a fundamentally different

properly understood the sense in which Kantian morals are "universal" and recognized that strict Kantian *universality* is not to be conflated with mere *generality*, we shall see that Kant's moral universalism—especially if it is read literally—is consistent with racist particularism (section 1.3). Establishing this point and thereby freeing ourselves from the assumption of a simple contradiction will be an important first step toward a more systematic investigation of the place of raciology in Kant's philosophy (sections 1.4 and 1.5).

## 1.3. Racism and Kant's Moral Universalism: A Noncontradictory Pairing

In section 1.2, we saw that Kleingeld treated the inconsistent universalist and consistent inegalitarian readings as two diametrically opposed ways of responding to the perceived contradiction between a literal reading of Kant's moral universalism and his racism. That is, at least for the Kant before 1790s,

> There is a genuine contradiction between, on the one hand, Kant's stated universalist moral principles, which are formulated as applying equally to all humans (and even to all rational beings), and, on the other hand, his specific views on racial hierarchy and the various alleged deficiencies on the part of non-whites. (Kleingeld 2007: 584)

Most of the commentators involved in this debate see the alleged contradiction as a straightforwardly logical one. Accordingly, we are asked either to remove the contradiction by rejecting one half of the contradictory pair (Mills 2005, 2014) or to bite the bullet and see what lessons we can learn from the fact that even a great thinker like Kant could hold contradictory beliefs (Allais 2016, 2019).

The assumption of logical contradiction is ubiquitous in other commentaries as well, be they critical or defensive of Kant (or of his philosophy). For instance, Bernasconi cautions that, while the contradiction between Kant's universal moral theory and his racism feels "intolerable to us," historians of philosophy should take care not to "project a solution to the contradiction onto Kant's text where evidence is lacking" (2011: 292–93). Louden

vision of how, if one wishes, to move forward with Kant's philosophy. I will pick up this point in the conclusion to the book.

locates the contradiction between what Kant is "logically committed" to by his moral theory and what he "personally" believes. Separating the philosopher from his philosophy, Louden goes so far as to suggest that, on account of the "many private prejudices and contradictory tendencies" exhibited in his writings, the racist *Kant* might very well "not accept these logical implications of his own theory"; nonetheless, Kant's *theory*, which is what a responsible interpreter should focus on, is "stronger than his prejudices." Thus, Louden finds equilibrium in exalting Kant's philosophy while recognizing his personal failure on the issue of race. If some of us worry that not enough attention has been paid to Kant's racism, Louden seems more concerned that too much attention to this problem can overshadow the scholarly appreciation of Kant's philosophy itself. His prescription is to acknowledge Kant's racist and various other prejudices once, only to concentrate our intellectual energy on the good stuff of Kantian philosophy: "We should not hide or suppress the prejudices, but neither should we overvalue them or try to inflate them into something they are not" (2000: 105; see Baron 2001; Wood 2008: 6–10, 14–15; Frierson 2013: 101–16).

So what is Kant logically committed to in theory that is allegedly contradicted by his personal racism? According to Louden, it is "the belief that the *entire human species* must eventually share in the destiny of the species: moral perfection." This belief, he submits, represents "the core value of universality in Kant's ethics." That is, Kant's moral universalism ultimately "refers to the hard and painful work of . . . figuring out what changes in human institutions and practices need to be made so that *all members* of the species will be brought into the moral community" (2000: 105–6, emphasis added).

Unfortunately, the italicized phrases in Louden's statements suggest a division fallacy, the inference that what is true of the whole must also be true of individual parts.[12] This inference is even more explicit in Louden's following claim:

> because [Kant] believes that the entire species progresses in perfection, he must also accept that the entire species is destined to eventually work its way through the preparatory steps of culture and civilization to moralization. It

[12] Kleingeld has also noted the fallacious nature of Louden's inference from what is true of the human species to what is true of individual humans (2007: 582n22).

> therefore cannot be the case . . . people of color will always remain mere passive citizens in the realm of ethics. (2000: 105)

To Kant, however, what is true of the human species as a whole is not on that account true of all individual humans. This is especially so when we consider human progress. As he states in the *Anthropology*,

> with all other animals left to themselves, each individual reaches its complete destiny; however with the human being only the *species*, at best, reaches it; so that the human race can work its way up to its destiny only through progress in a series of innumerably many generations. (Anth, 7: 324; see Päd, 9: 445; V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1196; V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 839–40; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1416–18)

What explains this difference between humans and "all the other animals," both being earthly creatures, is that rationality defines the former. Kant elaborates this point in the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (1784).

> *In the human being* (as the only rational creature on earth), *those predispositions whose goal is the use of his reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual*. Reason . . . needs attempts, practice and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight to another. . . . nature perhaps needs an immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next, in order finally to propel its germs [*Keime*] in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim. And this point in time must be, at least in the idea of the human being [*Idee des Menschen*], the goal of his endeavors, because otherwise the natural predispositions [*Naturanlagen*] would have to be regarded for the most part as in vain and purposeless; which would remove all practical principles and thereby bring nature . . . under the suspicion that in the case of the human being alone it is a childish play. (IaG, 8: 18–19; see Anth, 7: 329–30; R1471a [1790–1804], 15: 650)

This passage contains two concepts—"germs" and "natural predispositions" in the human *species*—that are key to understanding how Kant's raciology may interact with other parts of his philosophy. I will unpack these concepts,

as Kant uses them in different contexts, throughout this book (especially in Chapters 3 and 4). For now, I shall only highlight two related points.

First, as Louden rightly notes (2000: 96) and as I will explain in Chapters 3 and 4, Kant defends monogenism (as opposed to polygenism) in his theory of race: all races belong to the same human species. The theory posits a single first human phylum (*Stamm*), which contained certain germs and natural predispositions; these original germs and predispositions developed differently under the various material conditions (climates) in which the early humans lived for a long time; four basic races, differentiated by skin colors (white, yellow, black, red), were formed in that process.

This monogenetic theory *entails nothing*, however, about the standing of each race in human affairs. In other words, one cannot extract any "moral meaning" from "the unity of the human species," as Louden attempted to do (2000: 103–4). All races are indeed humans, having developed from the same original phylum of the species. When it comes to races, however, Kant is ultimately more interested in what differentiates them than what they have in common (BBM, 8: 99). Even more tellingly, when Georg Forster (1754–94), a tentative polygenist, observes that monogenism "has not prevented a single act of ignominy [especially slavery] throughout all the time in which it has been accepted" by the white Europeans against such "ill-treated people" as "Negro" slaves (2013: 165–66),[13] part of Kant's response is to double down on his assessment of "Negroes" as lacking, for instance, any immediate inner "drive [*Trieb*]" for sustained activity or industry (GTP, 8: 174n). Can we simply treat this response on Kant's part as one of his personal "prejudices and contradictory tendencies," acknowledge that it is there, and then hasten to embrace the lofty promise of his moral theory, as Louden suggested that a responsible scholar should do (2000: 105)? I doubt it.

This takes me to my second point. Just as Kant posits certain germs and natural predispositions in the original human phylum that developed into different human races over a long period of time, so does he, in the passage from the "Idea" quoted above, characterize rational capacities as a set of germs and natural predispositions "in our species," which may be developed only gradually over generations. If the germs and predispositions in the former case require certain conditions for their development into the

[13] Forster published a critique of Kant's theory of race in 1786 (reprinted in Forster 1991). It is translated in Mikkelsen 2013: 143–67. I am referring to the translation as Forster 2013. Kant's third essay on race (1788) was a direct response to Forster's critique. I will explain some aspects of their exchange in Chapters 3 and 4.

so-called races, Kant holds an analogous view in the latter case: it takes hard work and intergenerational transmission of enlightenment to fully develop the germs and predispositions that define "the human being" as the only *rational species* on earth. In theory, nothing about this view excludes any individual or group of individuals from participating in the species-bound endeavors toward "the idea of the human being." It nonetheless gives Kant plenty of conceptual space to allow an entire race to be sidelined along the way—if not intentionally by another race,[14] then due to its own naturalized inability for "attempts, practice and instruction," all of which presuppose an immediate inner *drive* (we just saw Kant denying this drive to "Negroes").

Thus, if Kant must ascribe rationality to all races as humans, he is logically committed to this ascription only if rationality is taken in the sense of *Keime* and *Naturanlagen*. In this way, he can believe without contradiction that, from the perspective of human history, those germs and natural predispositions will never fully develop in some races—in the race of "Negroes," for stance, because they lack the inner drive required by such development.[15] If whites "contain all drives of nature in affects and passions, all talents, all predispositions to culture and civilization and can obey as well as rule" and are therefore "the only ones [*die einzige*] who always progress toward perfection" (R1520 [1780–89], 15: 878, translated in Louden 2000: 99), as far as Kant is concerned it will still be the case that "the human being" has accomplished his destiny through this blessed race. So Kant's racism is *not* "curiously at odds with his universal *Keime* theory" (Wilson 2014: 205).

Here, then, is one sense in which there is no logical contradiction between the putative universality of Kant's moral theory and his racist views: if what makes the moral theory "universal" is that it is true of the entire human *species* (à la Louden), it is not therefore true of all *races* within the species. There is another sense in which Kant's moral universalism is logically consistent with racism. To appreciate it, we need to examine the notion of strict or

[14] The qualification that there is no need to assume an intentional sidelining of one race by another is important. It accommodates the Kantian moral principle that no *human being* can use another as means, while allowing Kant to hold that *nature* may nevertheless treat individual humans as means to fulfill *its* end for humanity as a species and that the treatment may well be differentiated along racial lines. In his own words (while talking about the character of the female sex), there is a difference between "what we *make* our end" and "what *nature's end* was" (Anth, 7: 305–6). I have explained elsewhere how this distinction gives Kant conceptual space to tolerate chattel slavery as an inevitable chapter in the civilizational phase of humanity, even if he deems it morally wrong (Lu-Adler 2022c).

[15] Louden helpfully provides an assorted list of Kant's "disturbing remarks" about how the races differ with respect to "sensibility," "intelligence," "talents," and "culture" (2000: 98–100). Also see Mills 2005: 173–75.

absolute universality that characterizes his pure moral theory. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant contrasts such universality with "empirical universality."

> Experience never gives its judgments true or strict but only assumed and comparative universality (through induction), so properly it must be said: as far as we have yet perceived, there is no exception to this or that rule. Thus if a judgment is thought in strict universality, i.e., in such a way that no exception at all is allowed to be possible, then it is not derived from experience, but is rather valid absolutely *a priori*. (B3–4)

On this account, strict universality goes hand in hand with necessity—that something could not have been otherwise—and both point to the apriority of a cognition (B4).

Universality in this absolute sense essentially differs from mere generality. Kant stresses this difference in the context of arguing that, to establish metaphysics as a special kind of cognition, one must sharpen the distinction between what is "in our power completely *a priori*" and what "can be derived only from experience *a posteriori*." He criticizes past attempts at a scientific metaphysics for failing to do so.

> When it was said [by previous philosophers] that metaphysics is the science of the first principles of human cognition, an entirely special kind of cognition was not thereby marked off, but only a rank in regard to generality, through which, therefore, it could not be clearly differentiated from empirical cognition; for even among empirical principles some are more general and therefore higher than others, and in the series of such a subordination (where one does not differentiate that which can be cognized completely *a priori* from that which can be cognized only *a posteriori*), where is one to make the cut that distinguishes the *first* part and highest members from the *last* part and the subordinate members? (A843/B871)

In brief, if metaphysics is to be a scientific—that is, demonstratively certain—system of the principles (as well as concepts) for human cognition as such (*überhaupt*), it must show that these principles are not just the most general of all principles; rather, they must be a priori in origin, so as to ensure their strict universality.[16]

[16] Kant's argument for this point is complicated by the fact that metaphysics includes two

This distinction between strict universality and mere generality points to another distinction that will prove key to clarifying the relation between Kant's moral universalism and his racist views. It is a distinction between two kinds of abstraction. The ascending degrees of generality reflected in the "subordination" mentioned in the passage just quoted result from increasing levels of *logical abstraction*: starting with given (lower) cognitions, one compares and reflects on them, *abstracts from differences* among them, and thereby arrives at a higher cognition that represents what they have in common; this process may be iterated until one reaches the highest cognition, from which no further differentia may be abstracted (Log, 9: 94–99).[17]

This logical process cannot be used to generate strictly universal cognitions. If the lower cognitions are themselves acquired a posteriori, so are the higher ones obtained from them through logical abstractions. Strictly universal cognitions must be acquired a priori, in abstraction from *all* experience (B1–6). Here we have a case of *real abstraction*, which is typically an *abstraction from certain conditions of application*. To illustrate, consider Kant's characterization of "pure logic" as opposed to "applied logic."

> In the former we abstract from all empirical conditions under which our understanding is exercised, e.g., from the influence of the senses, from the play of imagination, . . . indeed in general from all causes from which certain cognitions arise or may be supposed to arise, because these merely concern the understanding under certain circumstances of its application, and experience is required in order to know these. (A52–3/B77)

If pure logic studies the understanding entirely *in abstracto* and a priori, applied logic presents the rules of the use of the understanding "*in concreto*, namely under the contingent conditions of the subject, which can hinder or promote this use, and which can all be given only empirically." It relies on empirical psychology to uncover these subjective conditions, such as "attention, its hindrance and consequences, the cause of error, the condition of doubt, of reservation, of conviction, etc." In this way, the two logics are

parts—ontology (in the transformed Kantian sense) and "metaphysics proper" (B23–4). For discussion, see Lu-Adler 2018a.

[17] This kind of abstraction is "logical" because it concerns the origin of a concept regarding its mere *form* as a general representation or "a representation common to several objects" (Log, 9: 91, 93–94).

"entirely separated" from each other, although both can be called "general logic" (A53–4/B77–9).[18]

Logical entailment works differently for the two kinds of abstraction. For cognitions (concepts, for example) that relate to one another in a hierarchy of subordination as a result of iterated logical abstractions, we have this rule: "What belongs to or contradicts higher concepts also belongs to or contradicts all lower concepts that are contained under those higher ones" (Log, 9: 98). This logical rule does not apply to products of real abstraction. Just because something is true of the understanding *in abstracto*, it does not follow that it is also true of human understanding *in concreto*. For example, while the former is necessarily free of errors, the latter is characteristically susceptible to errors due to the influence of sensibility.[19]

What is most notable for my purpose here is that Kant illustrates the relation between pure and applied logics by an analogy to the moral case:

> pure logic is related to [applied logic] as pure morality, which contains merely the necessary moral laws of a free will in general [*überhaupt*], is related to the doctrine of virtue proper, which assesses these laws under the hindrances of the feelings, inclinations, and passions to which human beings are more or less subject, and which . . . requires empirical and psychological principles just as much as that applied logic does. (A54–5/B79; see GMS, 4: 410n)

This comparison suggests that the abstraction operative in Kant's pure moral theory is some sort of *real abstraction*, which befits the *strict universality* that characterizes this theory. Most of the commentators involved in the debate about Kant's racism have overlooked this important fact. Instead, they seem to reduce the universality of Kantian morality to its generalizability to all human beings *in concreto*. For example, Bernasconi illustrates the perceived tension between Kant's moral universalism and his racism in terms of "the

[18] See Lu-Adler 2018b (66–67, 112–14, 155–56), which explains this distinction between pure and applied logics with an emphasis on the demands imposed by Kant's conception of the former as a "science."

[19] I explain this point in Lu-Adler 2017. The fact that pure general logic is a product of real abstraction is key to Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics: besides abstracting from the empirical subjective conditions of the human understanding, pure logic also abstracts from the conditions under which an object of cognition may be given to us; it considers the object as such (*überhaupt*), regardless of how our cognition refers to it; as a result, the rules of pure general logic can serve only as standards for the formal assessment of all cognitions, but not as tools for obtaining specific cognitions (see Lu-Adler 2018b: 144–49, 154–69).

contradiction between *general* statements of human equality and the existence of slavery" (2011: 293, emphasis added). When Mills, as I quoted him in section 1.2, criticized others for ascribing a flagrant contradiction to Kant by insisting on an unrestricted, genuinely universalist interpretation of his moral philosophy, he likewise read the universalism in question as a general claim about all humans—all "biological humans" to be exact. Accordingly, Mills submitted, we can make Kant consistent in the face of his racism only by placing a *scope restriction* on his moral claims, to reflect its intended exclusive reference to white Europeans.

In short, the claim of contradiction between a literal reading of Kant's moral universalism and his racism hinges on two related, equally flawed assumptions. One reduces the stated universality of Kant's pure moral theory to its generalizability over a given domain of application. The other treats the relation between the concept of human being that figures in Kant's moral universalism and the concept of blacks, for instance, as a matter of logical subordination (generated through logical abstraction), so that what is true of the former must, by way of logical entailment, also be true of the latter.

Kant would be baffled by these assumptions. In truth, his moral universalism chiefly refers to the necessity and strict universality, in the sense explained above, of moral concepts and moral laws. To set forth such concepts and laws in their universality (*im Allgemeinen*), Kant reasons in the *Groundwork*, is to "set [them] forth . . . *in abstracto*" (GMS, 4: 409) and trace their "origin completely a priori in reason" (4: 411).[20] That is, they "cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely contingent cognitions." Rather, they must be derived "from the universal concept of a rational being as such [*überhaupt*]" (4: 411–12). Accordingly, the proposition that moral concepts and laws hold for all "human beings" comes with a significant caveat: these must be considered as mere rational beings, in total abstraction from "the nature of the human being" and from "the circumstances of the world in which he is placed."[21] Nor can the relevant concept 'rational being'

[20] Kant often equates treating something "universally" with treating it "in abstracto" (KpV, 5: 67; Log, 9: 45).

[21] One thing Kant's pure moral theory does not abstract from is the *finite* nature of human rationality. As Henry Allison puts it, in the *Groundwork* Kant uses 'humanity' as "a place-holder for finite rational agency" (2011: 207). This finality is not unique to human rationality, though, and so is not derived from a specific notion of human nature. It is rather a feature of rational beings in general qua *created* beings (see note 24 below). If all rational beings are finite in terms of being limited by sensibility, Kant is abstracting from the specific conditions that limit humanity as an *earthbound* variety of rational beings. To appreciate this point, we may consider Kant's analogous treatment of human understanding in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. When he first derived categories as the pure concepts that arise in the understanding itself a priori when it brings synthetic unity to a given manifold of

be derived through logical abstraction from lower concepts representing different classes of rational beings. Rather, it must be a concept "of pure reason" (4: 389).

Thus, one cannot reduce Kant's moral universalism to general claims about human beings *in concreto* (as empirically situated), be they black or white. For this reason, one cannot say that its literal reading is contradicted by what Mills called Kant's "racist particularism" about "biological humans." Moral universalism, properly understood, is on an entirely different logical plane than racist particularism. There is simply no direct logical comparison to make between them (this, as we shall see, does not rule out other meaningful relations between them within Kant's broader philosophical system). All in all, as Inder Marwah puts it while critiquing Mills's analysis, Kant's racial theory is "of a different order" than his moral theory, wherefore the two sides are "not amenable to flat-out contradiction" (2019: 106).

Even when Kant says that the system of morals, which must first be set forth a priori as pure philosophy (as metaphysics of morals), "needs anthropology for its *application* to human beings" (GMS, 4: 412), the concept of human being in this case still does not refer to all concretely embodied individuals. What is taken into consideration for the application, as Kant puts it in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, will be "the particular *nature* of human beings, which is cognized only by experience." The anthropology that investigates this nature is moral (or practical) anthropology, which

> would deal only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in *fulfilling* the laws of a metaphysics of morals. It would deal with the development, spreading, and strengthening of moral principles (in education in schools and in popular instruction), and with other similar teachings and precepts based on experience. (MS, 6: 217; see GMS, 4: 388–89; V-Mo/Collins, 27: 244–45; V-Mo/Mron II, 29: 599)

intuition, he "could not abstract . . . from the fact that the manifold for intuition must already be *given* prior to the synthesis of understanding," but only from the manner in which such a manifold may be given; that is, he could not abstract from the discursive nature of a finite intellect (in contrast to an understanding, such as the "divine understanding," that itself intuits). What is left undetermined by that initial derivation of categories is whether the intuition through which objects are given is "our own or some other but still sensible one." In other words, Kant still has to show that those categories are applicable to "our (human) intuition," which is uniquely bounded by space and time (B145–46, 150–51).

This passage resonates with Kant's account of "the character of the species" in the *Anthropology*, where he is concerned with how "the human being, as an animal endowed with the *capacity of reason* (*animal rationabile*), can make out of himself a *rational animal* (*animal rationale*)"—in accordance with "the idea of possible rational beings on earth in general [*überhaupt*]" (Anth, 7: 321–22).[22]

Anthropology is therefore the science—insofar as it is "systematically formulated"—that seeks to "know the human being according to his species as an earthly being endowed with reason." The part of this knowledge that considers what the human being "as a free acting being makes, or can and should make of himself" (Anth, 7: 119) is now called "pragmatic."[23]

> The sum total of pragmatic anthropology, in respect to the vocation of the human being and the characteristic of his formation, is the following. The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to *cultivate* himself, to *civilize* himself, and to *moralize* himself by means of the arts and sciences. (7: 324–25; see V-Anth/Fried, 25: 471–72; V-Anth/Pillau 25: 735; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1211, 1367–68; V-Anth/Busolt 25: 1436)

Here, 'the human being' refers to the human *species* (when contrasted with other animals on earth) or human race (when contrasted with extraterrestrial rational beings).[24] As Kant puts it elsewhere, he is interested in understanding the character of humanity as such (*überhaupt*), so as to establish the hope—as "an idea which is possible"—that "the human race . . . will attain the greatest degree of perfection [moralization]," even though it may take

[22] Later in the *Anthropology*, Kant explains that "character" can be used in two senses from a pragmatic viewpoint: one may say either that "a certain human being has *this* or that (physical) character" or that "he simply has *a* character (a moral character), which can only be one, or nothing at all." Accordingly, one may distinguish "what is *characteristic* in (a) [a human being's] *natural aptitude* or natural predisposition, (b) his *temperament* or sensibility, and (c) his *character* purely and simply, or way of thinking." The first two are *natural* predispositions indicating "what can be made of the human being," whereas the last, *moral* predisposition, "indicates what he is prepared to make of himself" (Anth, 7: 285). On Kant's theory of character, see Munzel 1999; Coble 2003; Frierson 2013: 64–70. For a self-described "heterodox" reading of Kant's theory of race that revolves around his theory of character, see Yab 2021.

[23] On the relation between moral or practical anthropology and pragmatic anthropology, see Louden 2000: 27–29, 71–74. For focused analyses of the nature of Kant's "pragmatic anthropology," see Wilson 2006: 27–41; Frierson 2013: 119–31 (with a section on moral anthropology at 121–24).

[24] Kant refers to the human species (*Menschengattung*) as human "race [*Rasse*]" when contrasting it with "rational beings on other planets, as a multitude of creatures arising from one demiurge" (Anth, 7: 331). I will discuss this contrast and its relevance to Kant's theory of race in Chapter 3.

countlessly many generations (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 696–97). Explicating the "character of human species" in this way is the same as analyzing "the concept of human nature in general [*überhaupt*]" (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 838). This in fact captures what is unique about Kant's conception of anthropology: it is "not a description of human beings, but of human nature" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 471). So, once again, Kant is not referring to individual humans *in concreto* at all, let alone an aggregative sum of them.

This takes us back to what I pointed out earlier in response to Louden's interpretation of Kant's claims about the moral prospect of humanity: logically speaking, such claims *entail nothing* about whether all actual, spatiotemporally situated individuals can participate equally in working toward the envisioned prospect. To borrow Kant's own terminology, there is a fundamental difference between considering "the human race, taking its species as a whole, that is, *collectively* (*universorum*)" and considering "all of the individuals (*singulorum*), where the multitude does not yield a system but only an aggregate gathered together" (Anth, 7: 320; see SF, 7: 79, 84). With this kind of distinction, Kant will have plenty of room to assign different places to white versus nonwhite races in his vision of human progress, all in the name of what would help the human species to reach its final (moral) destiny. No cognitive dissonance is required for him to exclude nonwhites from playing any agential role in the species-bound striving toward such a destiny. All he needs, as we shall see in section 1.4, is a great deal of philosophical ingenuity and an extraordinary ability to weave everything into a unified system.

## 1.4. From What Nature Makes of Man to What Man Can Make of Himself: Raciology in Kant's System

### 1.4.1. Physical Geography as the Original Home of Racialism

I have explained that, contrary to the common assumption, there is no logical contradiction between Kant's moral universalism (read literally) and his racist views, insofar as the former is strictly about rational beings *in abstracto* whereas the latter pertains to human beings *in concreto*. Now the question is where to locate raciology in Kant's system. My suspicion is that it cannot be confined to a single location, given my distinction between racialism and

racism in section 1.1. That being said, it can be instructive to consider two plausible locations, namely anthropology and physical geography, and determine whether to place Kant's raciology in one or the other (or both).[25]

When Kant introduces pragmatic anthropology at the beginning of the preface to the *Anthropology*, he compares it with physiological anthropology. Pragmatic anthropology studies what the human being makes or can (should) make of himself. By contrast, physiological anthropology investigates "what *nature* makes of" him. Insofar as this investigation is a matter of "theoretical speculation," the investigator "is a mere observer and must let nature run its course." The resulting "theoretical knowledge of the world" includes, among other things, "knowledge of the races of human beings as products belonging to the play of nature." This racial knowledge is part of "an extensive knowledge of *things* in the world," alongside the knowledge of "animals, plants, and minerals from various lands and climates." As such, it does not teach us anything about "the human being as a *citizen of the world*."[26] The latter is precisely what Kant intends to address in his *Anthropology* "from a pragmatic point of view" (Anth, 7: 119–20).

These remarks suggest that the subject of race belongs in physiological anthropology. The same subject may *also* have a place in pragmatic anthropology, however. To see how, consider the section of the *Anthropology* entitled "On the Character of the Races."[27] The section has two paragraphs. Kant conveniently refers the reader to the relevant parts of Christoph Girtanner's elaborate Kantian treatise on natural history (as I mentioned in section 1.2). He also uses the occasion to make a substantial point, though.

[25] Louden also examines these options (2000: 94–95). My analysis and conclusion will be quite different from his.

[26] The concept of world citizen (*Weltbürger*) is central to Kant's cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld 2011). To my knowledge, the first publication in which Kant uses this concept is "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764). Having argued that the European man "alone"—in comparison with such others as Amerindians, "Negroes," and those "in the Orient" (GSE, 2: 252)—can make his feelings and inclinations morally appropriate (2: 254), Kant concludes the "Observations" with a brief history of "the taste of human beings" that begins with the Greeks and ends with his own time. His special wish for the latter period is that "the as yet undiscovered secret of education should . . . raise the moral feeling in the breast of every young citizen of the world [*Weltbürger*] into an active sentiment" (2: 255). In a way, this desire to educate *Weltbürger* serves as the guiding thread of Kant's courses on anthropology and geography: he intends these courses to give students the world knowledge (*Weltkenntniß*) they need in order to be effective players in the world as "the stage of [their] destiny" (VRM, 2: 443). Racial (self-)knowledge will be an integral part thereof.

[27] This section corresponds to Kant's handwritten notes on anthropology that are organized under the heading "Der Charakter der Rasse" (R1373–78 [between the late 1770s and the mid-1780s], 15: 598–602). The point he drives home in these notes is that racial distinctions (in terms of skin color) are a *necessary* product of nature, formed *in accordance with certain natural laws*. This, as I shall explain in Chapters 3 and 4, is also a key point in all three of Kant's race essays.

By the law of nature, he explains, a biological race is to be preserved through genetic diversifications within it:

> in a people of the same race (for example, the white race), instead of allowing the formation of their characters constantly and progressively to approach one another in likeness—where ultimately only one and the same portrait would result, as in prints taken from the same copperplate—rather . . . diversify to infinity the characters of the same tribe [*Stamme*] and even of the same family in physical and mental [*Geistigen*] traits.[28] (Anth, 7: 320)

In short, "proximity of kinship notoriously results in infertility," because "*fertility* in matings is regenerated through the heterogeneity of individuals" (7: 321). Technically, this piece of information belongs in physiological anthropology. Kant no doubt finds it important, however, to include it in a treatise that focuses on pragmatic anthropology. He is warning the white race—it would be hard to believe that he is only casually referring to this race as an "example"—against inbreeding.[29] Issuing such a warning in the context of pragmatic anthropology, as odd as it may sound, in fact makes perfect sense. After all, on Kant's account, it takes three stages for the human being, as an *animal* with rational capacity, to make a rational being out of himself:

> he first *preserves* himself and his sort [*Art*]; secondly, trains, instructs, and *educates* them for domestic society; thirdly, *governs* them as a systematic whole (arranged according to principles of reason) appropriate for society. (7: 322, modified translation)

Obviously, without successfully preserving one's sort through biological reproductions, there would be no education or governance to speak of. Such success in turn presupposes relevant theoretical knowledge of what *nature* makes of humans qua reproductive animals. For Kant, this knowledge

[28] The allusion to *Geist* may be significant here. In Kant's system, *Geist* together with genius is the basis of everything from concept formation to fine art, which presupposes true taste (KU, 5: 316–17). They are part of the "talent" according to which "the human being is formed" or cultivated (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1157). Having or not having *Geist* therefore determines the destiny of a people in Kant's view. He speculates, for instance, that the "Oriental" (represented by the Chinese and Hindus) has "come to the bounds of its destiny" because "it lacks spirit" (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 840; see V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1232–33; V-PG/Hesse, 26.2: 227–36; R1371, 15: 579; R1372, 15: 598).

[29] There is a relevant historical example: as geneticists can now confirm (Alvarez et al. 2009), statistically significant inbreeding was a major cause of the extinction of the Spanish Habsburg dynasty (1516–1700).

includes the law against inbreeding within the same (white) race, to which he would add a further prohibition against interbreeding between whites and nonwhites.[30]

So, while prioritizing pragmatic anthropology in the *Anthropology*, Kant does not disvalue physiological investigations of the human being. It is just that he objects to practicing the latter investigations *merely* as a speculative exercise. He suggests this much when he explains the relation between pragmatic anthropology and *scholastic* anthropology in some of his lectures: the former "considers the knowledge of the human being as it is useful in society in general," whereas the latter approaches such knowledge "more as a [kind of] school knowledge [*Schulkenntniß*]." The difference therefore lies in different ways of looking at the same knowledge: "the former is the application of the latter in a society." That is, pragmatic anthropology is simply anthropology qua world knowledge (*Weltkenntniß*),[31] which "serves prudence rather than erudition" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1210–11).[32] Accordingly, Kant can take up findings of physiological anthropology and incorporate them into a *pragmatically oriented* anthropology (in the broad sense of this term as knowledge of the human being *überhaupt*). If a theory of race that investigates what nature makes of the human being and therefore technically belongs in physiological anthropology, it can still have a place in this overarching, pragmatically oriented anthropology.[33]

[30] On Kant's views about race mixing, see Larrimore 2008: 360–61; Eriksson 2009; Bernasconi 2011: 298–99; Mikkelsen 2013: 10–14; Gorkom 2020b; Yab 2021: 166–70. I will also touch on this topic in Chapter 4.

[31] On the significance of Kant's notion of *Weltkenntnis*, see Bianchi 2018. On the pedagogical mission it exemplifies, see Zammito 2014.

[32] See V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 733; V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 853–57; V-Anth/Busolt, 25: 1436. In making this contrast, Kant is opposing Ernst Platner's *Anthropologie für Aerzte und Weltweise* (1772), which in his view represents the merely scholastic approach. Kant has always emphasized the uniqueness of his own anthropology. In a letter to Marcus Herz toward the end of 1773, on the occasion of reading Herz's review of Platner's *Anthropologie*, Kant wrote: "I intend to use [anthropology] to disclose the sources of all the [practical] sciences, the science of morality, of skill, of human intercourse, of the way to educate and govern human beings, and thus of everything that pertains to the practical" (Br, 10: 145).

[33] Mark Larrimore likewise asks whether to place race in physiological or pragmatic anthropology, by analyzing Kant's remarks about race in the preface to the *Anthropology* and in the section on the character of the races. "Kant's concern is race," Larrimore states emphatically, "but precisely *not* as a mere play of nature." This statement is misleading, if it suggests that race is not a subject matter of physiological anthropology understood as a theoretical investigation of what nature makes of man. What Larrimore really wants to show is that "*both* [kinds of anthropology] have things to say about race" and that, above all, Kant is interested in drawing out the "pragmatic upshot of physiological knowledge of race" or "transforming [the latter] into pragmatic knowledge by reference to the needs of practical reason" (2008: 360–61).

Another option, which is compatible with the one just described, is to place the subject of race in physical geography. One can find support for this placement in all three of Kant's announcements about his lecture course on physical geography.[34] All three announcements indicate that he approaches physical geography also with a pragmatic orientation.[35] In the "Plan and Announcement of a Series of Lectures on Physical Geography" (1757), Kant distinguishes "three ways of looking at the Earth." The first two are mathematical and political. Physical geography is the third, which "merely considers the natural characteristics of the globe and what is on it: the seas, dry land, mountains, rivers, the atmosphere, *human beings*, animals, plants, and minerals" (EACG, 2: 3, emphasis added).[36] Kant then provides an outline of this science, which he characterizes as a system constructed out of all the available, relevant, and verified sources, in its "general" and "particular" parts (2: 3–4). The particular part considers three kingdoms—animals, plants, and minerals. In the first of these, "*human beings* are considered and compared in respect of their differences in natural shape and colour in various regions of the Earth." Kant intends thereby "to explain those tendencies of human beings that are derived from the zone in which they live, the diversity of their prejudices and way[s] of thinking, *insofar as all this can serve to acquaint man better with himself*" (2: 9, emphasis added; see PG, 9: 183–375; V-PG/Holstein, 26: 3–5).

In his course announcement for the winter semester, 1765–66, Kant reiterates that he intends his course on physical geography to provide a "compendium of the things which might prepare [the students] and serve them

[34] Kant lectured on geography annually for forty years, from the summer semester of 1756 to his retirement in 1796. A course on anthropology branched off from it in the early 1770s, and Kant taught the two courses in alternate semesters ever since (Stark 2011a). There are thirty-six known sets of student notes of the geography lectures. For information about them, see Naragon 2006b. On the relation between geography and Kant's critical philosophy, see Clewis 2018. On why geography, a largely neglected part of Kant's system, should be taken more seriously, see Louden 2014. For a case study that supports this advice, see O'Neill 2011.

[35] On the pragmatic orientation of Kant's geography lectures, also see Wilson 2011, which emphasizes his intent to promote useful skills like prudence (understood as a skill in getting others to cooperate in one's ends).

[36] One finds an even more expansive division of geography in the Introduction to the *Physical Geography* edited by Friedrich Theodor Rink (with Kant's blessing). In addition to physical, mathematical, and political geographies, the division also includes mercantile geography (about interstate trade), theological geography (insofar as "theological principles frequently undergo fundamental changes according to differences of soil"), and moral geography (about "the customs and characters of people . . . according to the different regions"). Physical geography, as "a general outline of nature," is considered the "ground" for all the other geographies (PG, 9: 164–65; see V-PG/Kaehler, 26.2: 308–10; V-PG/Messina, 26.2: 621–29; V-PG/Dönhoff, 26.2: 747; V-PG/Dohna, 26.2: 1121). For a contextualized and comparative study of Kant's notion of geography, see Withers 2011.

for the exercise of practical reason." Now he distinguishes geography, taken "in the widest sense of the term," into physical, moral, and political parts. The first part specifies "the remarkable features of *nature* in its three realms." By contrast, the second part "considers *man*, throughout the world, from the point of view of the variety of his natural properties and the differences in that feature of man which is moral in character." Finally, political geography considers "what can be regarded as a product of the reciprocal interaction of the two previously mentioned forces, namely, the condition of the *states* and nations throughout the world." This expansive, tripartite science of geography has "great utility," Kant adds (NEV, 2: 312–13).[37]

Kant repeats this point about utility when he appends yet another announcement about his physical geography course to his first essay on race (the 1775 edition). Referring to the course as "a useful academic instruction and . . . the preliminary exercise in the *knowledge of the world*," he states:

> This knowledge of the world [*Weltkenntniß*] serves to procure the *pragmatic* element for all otherwise acquired sciences and skills, by means of which they become useful not merely for the school but rather for *life* and through which the accomplished apprentice is introduced to the stage of his destiny, namely, the *world*. Here a two-fold field lies before him, of which he requires a preliminary outline so that he can order in it all future experiences according to rules, namely, *nature* and the *human being*. . . . I call the first instruction *physical geography* . . . , the second one I call *anthropology*. (VRM, 2: 443; see PG, 9: 156–58; V-Anth/Fried, 25: 469–70; V-PG/Messina, 26.2: 621–25; V-PG/Dönhoff, 26.2: 745–46)[38]

In this way, the previous distinction between physical and moral geographies has morphed into one between physical geography and anthropology, which together offer the knowledge that Kant thinks his students need in order to be effective players in the world as the stage of their destiny. These courses have *nature* and the *human being* as their respective objects of investigation.

[37] In his lectures on pedagogy (1803), Kant submits that, in the education of a child, "it is most advantageous to have the first scientific instruction be concerned with geography, mathematical as much as physical." This is followed by "political geography," learned through illustrated travel accounts (Päd, 9: 474; see 9: 476).

[38] For a contextualized analysis of the origin of Kant's lectures on anthropology and their relation to his geography lectures, see Wilson 2006: 7–26 (especially 15–20, which uses Kant's so-called race anthropology as a clue to the intimate relationship between geography and anthropology). There are forty-seven known sets of notes of Kant's anthropology lectures, thirty-five sets of which are either wholly or partially available. For information about the entire list, see Naragon 2006a.

It does not follow, however, that physical geography no longer talks about human beings at all. The contrast Kant is drawing here comes down to that between nature, of which human beings are also a part, and "the human being [as] the *sole freely acting being* on the earth's surface" (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 733). As Louden puts it, the two courses differ in *how* they treat human beings:

> in the geography lectures, human beings are treated primarily (though by no means exclusively) as "*things* in the world" that are "products belonging to the play of nature" (*Anth* 7: 120), whereas in the anthropology lectures, the human being is considered primarily (though by no means exclusively) as "a *citizen of the world*" (7: 120) who is "a free-acting being" (7: 119)—a creature who is not completely determined by his natural environment and regional habitat and who thus, "as a rational being endowed with freedom" (7: 285), can, at least to some extent, make his own character and determine his own way of life. (2011: 128)

This demarcation between physical geography and anthropology resonates with Kant's distinction between physiological and pragmatic anthropologies in the preface to the *Anthropology*, namely between what *nature* makes of the human being and what *he* "as a free acting being" can and should make of himself (Anth, 7: 119). In these terms, physical geography still treats human beings, though primarily as products of nature—as part of the animal kingdom—and hence mainly under a physiological description.

By this analysis, physical geography makes the original home for Kant's account of the basic racial differences among human beings *as effects of nature*. This captures the *racialist* part of his raciology that I described in section 1.1.[39] The human species is thereby divided into different races, each of which is assigned a distinct set of hereditary traits and dispositions. So construed, it is not yet racist in the exclusionary sense I stipulated. We still need to account for the latter aspect of Kant's raciology.

[39] For an analysis of how Kant might have talked about climatically determined racial differences in his geography lectures over the years, see Stark 2011b.

### 1.4.2. The Racist Upshot in Pragmatic Anthropology

To locate the racist aspect of Kant's raciology, we may begin with the following passage from the *Menschenkunde* (student notes on anthropology from around 1781–82).

> The discovery of what kinds of germs [*Keime*] lie latent [*verborgen*] in humanity gives us at the same time the means that we have to apply in order to hasten the unfolding of these natural predispositions [*Anlagen*]. Despite the unity of the human species, there is still a difference of races to take up, whose special character belongs to physical geography. (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1195, modified translation)

One can read the two sentences in this passage as indicating, in that order, two *levels* of knowing the human being. The higher level *abstracts*—in the sense of real abstraction I explained in section 1.3—from the conditions that are specified at the lower level. At the more abstract level, we are presented with knowledge of the human being's natural endowments, in the form of certain original *Keime* and *Anlagen* that mark "the unity of the human species." This knowledge, Kant suggests, at the same time indicates the means by which to effectuate humanity's destiny as the only rational species on earth. His pragmatic anthropology stresses this point. At the more concrete level, which takes us to physical geography, Kant thinks that nature also plays a crucial role in the variation among peoples—as inhabitants of different climate zones—in terms of their temperaments, drives (or lack thereof), and cognitive (in)abilities. As I mentioned in section 1.3 and will further explicate in later chapters (especially Chapter 4), Kant tends to racialize these differences, treating them as hereditary characteristics.

By this distinction of levels, I disagree with Louden's assessment that "ultimately the placement issue [that is, whether to place race in anthropology or in physical geography] is perhaps not terribly important." Granted, "Kantian anthropology and geography are viewed as intersecting halves of a larger whole," namely as two parts of a "pragmatic, cosmopolitan *Weltkenntnis*" (Louden 2000: 95; see 2011: 123–24). Still, how these two halves relate to each other on the issue of race is far more complex and significant than Louden has made it to be. If in both cases Kant attempted to give his students a comprehensive map of humanity, the difference is not simply that his geography lectures offered a "severely distorted map" with a "heavy reliance on racial

stereotypes," while his anthropology (along with his history essays) shows a "far better" map, namely a "moral map" of the human species progressing toward its destiny (Louden 2011: 135). Louden rightly admits that Kant's anthropology has its own problems: for instance, his "discussion of peoples in the *Anthropology* is very Western Eurocentric," whereas his geography contains much more detailed accounts of non-European peoples than of the European ones when the latter are included at all (2011: 131).[40] This arrangement is not incidental, however, but rooted in an intricate relation between physical geography and anthropology.

On my reading, the accounts of humanity in physical geography and pragmatic anthropology are not on the same plane for comparison: we cannot say that one is a "better" map of humanity than the other. Rather, considering that Kant's de facto audiences were the so-called "Occidental" whites (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1188),[41] geography and anthropology together give them a *two-stage process* of orienting themselves in a world increasingly linked through colonization and trade.[42] Here is a telltale statement that Kant makes while describing the "four races on earth":

> The white race contains all incentives [*Triebfedern*] and talents in itself; as a result *it must be considered in a bit more detail. Information concerning it is given above*. (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1187, original emphasis)

Kant's preceding description of the other three races contains an assessment of their (in)ability for culture. The assessment is a distillation of the data that he detailed in the geography courses. It gives the students an overview of what provisions nature has given to—or deprived of—each race: "The American people acquires no culture" for lacking the requisite driving force

[40] The topic of European peoples disappeared from Kant's geography lectures and was instead taken up in the newly established course on anthropology from 1772–73 onward (Stark 2011a: 78–79).

[41] This observation about Kant's de facto audiences is important. To borrow a distinction from philosophy of language, regardless of how we interpret the *semantics* of Kant's universalist moral and anthropologic claims, the norms of *pragmatics* or, as Mills puts it more specifically, the norms of Gricean conversational implicature "determine the inclusivity or exclusivity of reference" in the minds of Kant's white audience and such norms may well "track racial membership" (2014: 145; see Korta and Perry 2020 on pragmatics). This point becomes more salient as we go beyond the individualistic discourse about Kant's racism and adopt a notion of racism that focuses on its *formation as an ideology* in a socially embedded network of *meaning maker*s. I will explain this in Chapter 2.

[42] It is important to learn about the geopolitical backdrop against which Kant enthusiastically pursued and taught geography. Such knowledge can deepen our understanding of his writings and teachings about race. For a brief but instructive account of the backdrop, see Mignolo 2011: 320–25. I will give a more detailed account in Chapter 4.

(*Triebfeder*) and passions; the "Negro race" can acquire "a culture of slaves" by virtue of possessing the sort of drives and passions that "allow themselves to be trained" (in the same sense in which animals can be trained); the race represented by "the Hindus" can acquire some culture of art but not sciences, due to an inability for abstract thoughts (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1187; I will discuss these claims and their practical implications in Chapters 4 and 6).

Through a contrast with these *other* races, Kant's students can be expected to believe this much about themselves as members of the white race: nature has generously endowed their race with all the drives and talents that are necessary for progressing toward the highest culture and toward moral perfection. This marks the first stage of the "Occidental" white man's self-orientation in the world: he must know *what nature has made him as a man of the white race*, in comparison with all the other races.[43]

The next stage is to figure out *what to do* with this knowledge. The originally italicized phrases in the short passage quoted above point to this stage. What is the antecedently provided "information concerning [the white race]"? In the *Menschenkunde*, the parts preceding the quote discussed, among other things, the inner "characteristic" of the human being including "talent, temperament, and character; that is, natural gifts, the way of sensing, and the way of thinking" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1156–76). It is important to talk about these things because, if anthropology is primarily concerned with what the human being can make of himself, he cannot do so out of thin air. Rather, there must be some *given* material for him to work on: "The human being is formed according to talent, he is made polite (civilized) according to temperament, and he is moralized according to character." Take talent, for instance. To this, Kant stipulates, belongs "natural aptitude [*Naturell*], or the capacity to learn, and spirit or genius." To ascribe a natural aptitude to human beings, he adds, is to signify the "the natural vocation of talent, the end for which nature has equipped one subject more than another" (25: 1157). To Kant's Occidental white students, his ensuing summary of racially differentiated natural provisions must sound like a straightforward illustration of this point about how nature has equipped different human beings unequally.

[43] I am literally referring to the white *man* here, partly because Kant makes this restrictive reference clear in the ensuing section, "Of the Character of the Sexes," by granting to women—to those in a civil state to be exact, as opposed to the "savage" women—only a natural predisposition toward some sort of *art* (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1188–94; see Anth, 7: 303–6). Besides the collection of essays in Schott 1997, one can get a sense of the continued controversy over Kant's views on women from these works: Mikkola 2011; Marwah 2013; Frierson 2013: 93–101; Pascoe 2015, 2019, 2022; Varden 2017, 2020; Sabourin 2021; Huseyinzadegan and Pascoe 2022.

Meanwhile, the talk of "vocation" suggests that, in telling his students their race is uniquely endowed with all the talents suited to humanity, Kant impresses on them a sense of duty in self-perfection. One only has duty to do what one is naturally capable of ("ought" implies "can"). This point becomes even more salient in Kant's discussion of character. Character, he instructs, consists in "the firm attachment to principles once they have been grasped" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1176). It has "an inner moral worth," because "a will is required [for it] on which one can definitely rely, a settled way of thinking and not merely a feeling" (25: 1169). Although character in this sense is *acquired*, the "natural predisposition of character is innate." Developing this innate predisposition into "the true character of a human being" requires education and "a great deal of activity and attention" on the part of the self-forming agent (25: 1174).[44]

Kant does not, however, grant every human being this prospect of acquiring a true character. Some human beings, he seems to think, lack the requisite natural provisions. For instance,

> If nature has not given a predisposition or an inner fund toward character to a person, but he is a game of instincts and stimulation, it is difficult to achieve one through art. (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1175–76, modified translation)

Furthermore, a "capacity to act in accordance with concepts and principles is required for character" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 655). This means that a human being must have certain intellectual abilities to form an actual character. If we connect this assumption with Kant's geographic account of racial differences, we get the sense that he would deny the prospect of character formation even to what he sees as the most advanced of all nonwhite races, namely the yellow race. Speaking of the Hindus, his go-to example for this race, Kant claims that they will remain stuck in the cultivation of arts and "never bring culture further" because they cannot rise to "abstract concepts" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1187). Kant thereby puts moralization, the supposed final end

[44] In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant invokes the South Sea Islanders to illustrate the case of a human being who would "let his talents rust and be concerned with devoting his life merely to idleness, amusement, procreation—in a word, to enjoyment" (MS, 4: 423; see MAM, 8: 122–23; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1422). So, even if Kant grants talents to the South Sea Islanders, such talents would remain wasted in his view. Elsewhere, commenting on the "happy inhabitants of Tahiti . . . in their tranquil indolence" (RezHerder, 8: 65), he suggests that the existence of such humans is purposeless if they indeed have "natural predispositions . . . equal to every other inhabitant of the world" (8: 62).

of humanity,[45] beyond their reach, insofar as the ability to form abstract concepts and principles is necessary for the actual formation of a character. He suggests that this is true of all "the Oriental peoples," who in his view "still have a child's [pictorial] language of humanity" that reflects a merely sensible mode of cognition; by contrast, "the Westerners abandoned sensibility much sooner and have raised themselves up to the concepts of the understanding" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1233; I will further explicate this contrast and its consequences in Chapter 6).

It is unsurprising, then, the section of the *Anthropology* that talks about the character of the people (*Charakter des Volks*) focuses on five Western nations—France, England, Spain, Italy, and Germany.[46] Kant stipulates that this section addresses "the question . . . about innate, natural character which, so to speak, lies in the blood mixture of the human being, not characteristics of nations that are acquired and *artificial*" (Anth, 7: 319). He shies away from determining the cause of the character of a people, saying only that it cannot be sufficiently explained by the "form of government" or "climate and soil." Instead, he seeks to describe the characters of the five chosen nations with respect to what *matters* in "an anthropology from a pragmatic point of view": such descriptive knowledge "makes it possible to judge what each can expect from the other and how each could use the other to its own advantage" (7: 312–13). As to why Kant only features those five nations, besides his belief that they alone can attain and have attained and maintained "a definite national character" (7: 319), the historical context may also be

[45] It is not immediately clear how to interpret moralization as the final end of humanity, especially given Kant's distinction between "final end" (*Endzweck*) and "ultimate end" (*letzter Zweck*) in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (KU, 5: 426–36). For the sake of argument, I will treat moralization, qua humanity's final end, as the realization of a community of equal and autonomous moral agents who recognize one another as such and who are unified under the moral law (for a brief but helpful explanation of this point, see Hedrick 2008: 253n30). As such, it is a condition of human existence that Kant captures with the notion of a kingdom or realm of ends (*Reich der Zwecke*) in the *Groundwork* (GMS, 4: 433–39; for analysis, see Allison 2011: 242–44).

[46] In the final paragraph of the section, Kant summarily mentions Russia, Poland, "the nationals of European *Turkey*," the modern Greeks, and the Armenians. The overall tone of this summary is dismissive, except for a seemingly favorable claim about the Armenians having a "character . . . superior to the fickle and groveling character of the modern Greek" (Anth, 7: 319–20). Elsewhere, Kant describes Eastern Europeans as akin to the "Orientals," a loaded descriptor in his vocabulary. He claims, for instance, that the Russians and Poles "have a greater Oriental character mixture than all other nations in Europe" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 661; see V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1185; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1413). That being said, the so-called "Oriental" whites (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1188)—on account of being designated as *white*—at least have a place in Kant's system that nonwhites do not. From the 1780s onward, Kant tends to talk about white peoples—including the Poles, Russians, and Turks besides major Western nations—in a dedicated section on the character of *nations*, followed by a separate section on the character of *races*. Nonwhites get a brief treatment only in the latter space (see V-Anth/Dohna, ms. 333–53).

important: by the late 1790s (the *Anthropology* was published in 1798), he became preoccupied with the intensifying intra-European conflicts—with the superpowers France and Britain at the center—and their impact on the prospect of perpetual peace in the world; presumably, he only saw Western Europeans as the proper agents of history, who would together determine the fate of humanity;[47] so they should first learn how to deal with each other.

This prioritization of Western Europeans does not mean that Kant has only positive things to say about them. To the contrary, he deliberately portrays each nation "somewhat more from the side of their faults and deviations from the rule than from the more beautiful side," partly because "flattery *corrupts* while criticism *improves*" (Anth, 7: 313). The principled *expectation* of improvement is the key, which Kant explicitly grants only to the "Occidental" whites.[48] Take the Spaniards, for instance. He claims that they are "centuries behind in the sciences" (7: 316) and even that they are "like Oriental peoples" in this regard (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1403). He does not attribute this situation to a natural inability to form abstract concepts or principles, however, as he did to the so-called Orientals. Rather, the Spaniards lagged behind other Western nations in the sciences "because they do not accept anything from other nations" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1183). In other words, the problem can be traced to their "noble national pride" (Anth, 7: 316). Likewise, their alleged "laziness" arises from—as laziness is commonly connected with—"pride, according to which they regard themselves as the most distinguished and most skillful nation" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1184). That is, they are "proud of not having to work" (Anth, 7: 316), as a privilege afforded to them by what they perceive to be their nation's exceptional advancement. As far as Kant is concerned, while this pride or belief that "they are of a noble origin" may turn out to be illusory (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1184), the laziness engendered thereby can be overcome *in principle* through, say, self-reflection and a more informed comparison with other nations. By contrast, Kant tends to naturalize

[47] Bernasconi 2011 and Valdez 2017 have already made similar points in response to Kleingeld's claim about Kant's belated qualms about colonialism and slavery. I have given my own contextualized account of the nonmoral considerations behind Kant's seemingly evolving views on the practices of slavery and the slave trade (Lu-Adler 2022c). I will return to this topic in Chapter 4.

[48] It would be beside the point to answer the charge of racism by pointing out that Kant said negative things about Europeans as well. A racial view is racist not just on account of saying negative things about a purported race but rather because what it says implies a *systematic exclusion* of that race from certain goods, including social and moral goods. In a way, it is a compliment to be criticized by Kant for falling short of an ideal—for example, for failing to develop one's naturally endowed talents through hard work. At least one is thereby included in the *normative* space Kant has carved out for the white race, wherein one is expected to improve upon oneself. By contrast, nonwhites remain *naturalized* and stuck in the *descriptive* domain of Kant's geography.

and racialize the alleged laziness of Amerindians and "Negroes," treating it as a climatically determined, hereditary, and irreversible physiological property (Lu-Adler 2022b).

Should we conclude that Kant's anthropologic claims are, in truth, not about the entire human species but only about the Occidental white men? My answer will be no.

To explain, let me briefly return to the interpretative issue I discussed in sections 1.2 and 1.3. As I pointed out, it has been taken for granted that racism logically contradicts the universalist claims of Kant's moral philosophy (as represented by the Categorical Imperative). I explained how there is no logical comparison to be made between the two relata in the first place: Kant's pure moral philosophy is strictly universal only because it considers rational beings completely *in abstracto*, whereas his racial views pertain to human beings *in concreto*, as embodied creatures living here and there on earth. I also rejected Louden's interpretation that Kant's moral universalism boils down to a claim about the moral prospect of the entire human species that can be generalized, by way of logical entailment, to all individual members thereof. In the case of humans, I argued, it would be a non sequitur—a fallacy of division—to derive propositions about individuals (or groups of individuals) from what is true of the species as a whole.

My account of the distinction between anthropology proper and physical geography helps to shed further light on this point. The stated aim of anthropology is to study the constant nature of human beings *überhaupt*, as the only earthbound creatures who have rational capacities but who are still a long way away from their destined perfections, especially moral perfection. In this regard, anthropology treats humanity *as a species*, which is presumably why Kant often refers to *the* human being—the definite article indicates the unity of the species—and talks about how he, as a free-acting being, can reach his final (moral) destiny. By contrast, physical geography considers spatiotemporally *particularized* human beings, as they are found in different regions of the Earth. It describes the ways in which they differ, insofar as such differences can be seen as effects of the natural factors—especially climates—that characterize the various geographic regions. Chief among these are *racial* differences.

This geographic account of racial differences, which on my reading mainly represents the racialist but not yet racist aspect of Kant's raciology, can in turn get the *racist upshot* when combined with certain claims of

anthropology. What is pivotal in this regard is Kant's teleological view of progress:[49]

> with the human species only the *species*, at best, reaches [its complete destiny]; so that the human race can work its way up to its destiny only through *progress* in a series of innumerably many generations. (Anth, 7: 324)
>
> The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to *cultivate* himself, to *civilize* himself, and to *moralize* himself by means of the arts and sciences. No matter how great his animal tendency may be to give himself over *passively* to the impulses of ease and good living, . . . he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by *actively* struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature. (7: 324–25)

As the table of contents of the *Anthropology* suggests,[50] what Kant's pragmatic anthropology offers is first and foremost an account of the natural characteristics that make the human being—*in abstraction* from all the geographically indexed differences within the species—suitable for living in society with others and achieving perfections in it. These include various cognitive and aesthetic faculties, affects and passions, and temperaments. At the same time, Kant's anthropology courses were de facto addressed to the "Occidental" white men (as I noted above), many of whom might also be or become somewhat acquainted with his physical geography—either by taking it in the preceding or ensuing semester or through his occasional references to its claims in his anthropology lectures. They would not be mistaken to walk away with the impression that they are the only naturally privileged race in possession of all the requisite dispositions and talents, wherefore they are singularly suited to play agential roles in humanity's progress toward its final (moral) destiny.

[49] On the centrality of Kant's teleological conception of human development, which is itself controversial, to his racism, see McCarthy 2004; Hedrick 2008; Hahmann 2022; Marwah 2022; Mateo and Stubenrauch 2022. I will also confirm this point in Chapter 4. A similar point may be made about his sexism, which systematically excludes women from political and moral enfranchisement (Marwah 2013).

[50] The *Anthropology* has two parts. Part I is "Anthropological Didactic," which is divided into three books (on the cognitive faculty, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire). Part II is "Anthropological Characteristic."

Besides the examples I already mentioned, Kant has left various other clues to this effect. Take the faculty of foresight, for instance. "To possess this faculty interests us more than any other [cognitive faculties]," he submits, "because it is the condition of all possible practice and of the ends to which the human being relates the use of his powers" (Anth, 7: 185). He then uses an example that one would expect to find in physical geography to illustrate what it is like not to have foresight.

> To live for a day (without caution and care) does not bring much honor to human understanding; it is like the Caribbean [an indigenous South American] who sells his hammock in the morning and in the evening is embarrassed about it because he does not know how he will sleep that night. (7: 186)

Kant makes a similar move while talking about "boredom and amusement." The context is a discussion of enjoyment and its relation to pain.

> Enjoyment is the feeling of promotion of life; pain is that of a hindrance of life. But (animal) life . . . is a continuous play of the antagonism of both.
>
> *Therefore pain must always precede every enjoyment*; pain is always first. (7: 231)

Pain holds a special place in Kant's account of human progress because it "stimulates us to activity" (recall that, in his view, only through active struggles can the human being make himself worthy). He esteems the "positive pain" of work as "the best way of enjoying one's life," because one has *earned* rest through "an arduous occupation (disagreeable in itself and pleasing only through success)." Even boredom, a negative pain, can play an instrumental role of driving one to activity. This "oppressive, even frightening arduousness of boredom," Kant suggests, afflicts only "cultivated human beings" and makes them willing to do anything to leave the present state (7: 232–33). The Caribbean again serves as the contrast.

> Because of his inborn lifelessness, the Carib is free from this arduousness. He can sit for hours with his fishing rod, without catching anything; thoughtlessness is a lack of incentive to activity, which brings pain with it, from which this one is spared. (Anth, 7: 233n; see V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1291–92, 1336)

In Kant's vocabulary, thoughtlessness is either "lively" or "lifeless"; the latter turns an individual into "inaction" and "makes his condition, for the new use of his powers of mind, inanimate" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 540). Pain is "the incentive [*Stachel*] of activity," through which "we feel our life"; the lack of pain therefore amounts to "lifelessness" (Anth, 7: 231).

This distinction between two kinds of thoughtlessness is also reflected in Kant's contrast of the Amerindians and Europeans in terms of whether they possess morally useful feelings. In the "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764),[51] an early publication that contains some of Kant's most notorious claims about nonwhites, he says this about the "savages . . . of North America": "an exceptional lack of feeling"—particularly "feeling for the beautiful in the moral sense"—"constitutes the mark of these kinds of human beings." By contrast, the European is supposedly endowed with all sorts of feelings and inclinations *and* capable of interweaving them "with so much that is moral" that he "alone" has found a way to make them "proper" (GSE, 2: 253–54).

Related to this contrast is Kant's account of the phlegmatic temperament. He associates phlegm with "a greater lack of moral feeling" and even a lack of "the cruder incentives, such as lust for money," incentives that are needed to "drive indolent human nature to actions for the common weal" (2: 218–19); the phlegmatic cast of mind is therefore not even worth further consideration (GSE, 2: 224). When Kant later speaks more favorably of phlegm in the *Anthropology*, he takes care to distinguish it from the sort attributed to Amerindians, that is, from "indolence (lifelessness)" (Anth, 7: 289). This allows him to appreciate "*phlegm* in the good sense," which signifies a "lack of affect that does not reduce the strength of incentives [*Triebfedern*] to action" (7: 252). This "fortunate phlegm (in the moral sense)," he claims, is a "natural gift of apathy" (7: 254).[52] He associates it with "the German's correct understanding and profoundly reflective reason as [one can expect] from any other people capable of the highest culture" (7: 318). Meanwhile, he continues to disparage "phlegm as weakness"—as marked by insensitivity and laziness (inactivity, lifelessness)—and singles out "the South Americans"

[51] According to Jimmy Yab, the "Observations" deserves a much greater attention in the study of Kant's theory of race than it has received in the existing literature. This text is "fundamental to Kant's conception of race," Yab contends, "in the sense that it introduces systematically the conception of 'Characteristik' from which Kant's theory of race and subsequently his anthropology and moral philosophy is based" (2021: 32).

[52] To make sense of Kant's view of apathy as a gift, see Baron 1995: 194–226; Denis 2000; Formosa 2011; Borges 2019: 105–24.

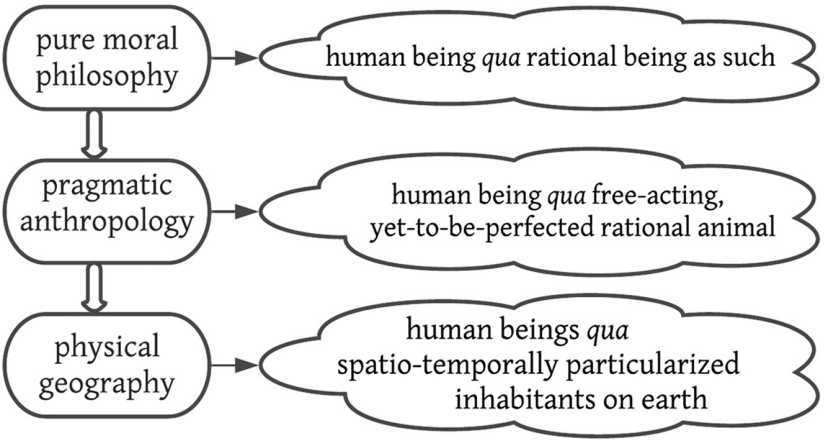



**Figure 1.1.** Three levels of discourse.

as an example thereof, with whom "even the sexual drive is weak" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1166).[53]

None of these examples implies that Kant's anthropology itself is already restricted in its scope. Anthropology can still be a theory that is primarily about the human nature *überhaupt*, in abstraction from the myriad ways in which it may be instantiated by individual humans. Kant's physical geography, with its comprehensive account of how human inhabitants around the world differ from one another *in concreto*, complements anthropology by indicating which peoples or races can play agential roles in the *actual historical unfolding* of humanity's progress toward its destined perfections.

## 1.5. Three Levels of Discourse: Pure Morals, Anthropology, and Geography

Combining the findings of sections 1.3 and 1.4, we may distinguish Kant's pure moral philosophy, pragmatic anthropology, and physical geography as three levels of discourse. Appropriate to each level is a distinct conception of "human being" (Figure 1.1).[54] The relation between each two adjacent levels

[53] On the relation between Kant's account of temperament and his racial views, see Mensch 2017.

[54] For a comprehensive study of Kant's multifaceted notion of "human being," see Frierson 2013: 9–132 (with discussions of Kant's views on race and, relatedly, on slavery and colonialism at 101–16).

in Figure 1.1 is that of real abstraction. Accordingly, each upper level needs the level right below it to specify the conditions of application from which it has abstracted (the downward arrows indicate this need).

More specifically, pure moral philosophy considers human beings as mere rational beings, in abstraction from the human nature that is the subject matter of anthropology. Therefore, it needs the latter to establish the real possibility for the human being, as an earthbound *animal rationabile* (animal capable of reason), to make an *animal rationale* (rational animal) out of himself—that is, to develop and perfect his rational capacities so as to approximate his destined moralization. If the human being *can* reach his final (moral) destiny on account of his natural endowments qua *animal rationabile*, there is a further question as to whether he *will* reach it:

> the human species should and *can* itself be the creator of its good fortune; however, that it *will* do so cannot be inferred *a priori* from what is known to us about its natural predispositions, but only from experience and history, with expectation as well grounded as is necessary for us not to despair of its progress toward the better, but to promote its approach to this goal with all prudence and moral illumination (each to the best of his ability). (Anth, 7: 328–29)

If by "experience and history" Kant is alluding to the kind of empirical knowledge about humans *in concreto* that geography (besides history) provides, this suggests a complementary relation between geography and anthropology.

That is, anthropology teaches about humanity's "natural predispositions" only as a species, in abstraction from the concrete, geographically varied conditions of human existence. Its relation to geography is therefore a matter of real abstraction: the anthropologic claims about the nature of humanity as such (*überhaupt*) are not drawn from a logical comparison of empirical observations about all human populations around the world so as to determine what they have in common; rather, they are made in abstraction from the racial and other purported human differences that geography investigates. Kant factors in this geographic knowledge as he seeks to determine whether humanity will indeed realize the hopeful vision of progress he has outlined in anthropology and, if the answer is yes, *who* among all the current human inhabitants of the world and their offspring are best equipped to participate in the process as agents. In sum, if anthropology establishes

the "can" (hopefulness) of human progress in a way that is still somewhat abstract, geography comes in as Kant addresses the question of "will" *in concreto*.

The *racist* aspect of Kant's raciology, in the exclusionary sense I explained in section 1.1, takes shape in this attempt to make the anthropologic vision concrete in light of the geographic knowledge. From Kant's perspective, one needs this knowledge for two related purposes. First, it is part of the self-knowledge that one needs in order to figure out how to make something of oneself on the basis of one's natural endowments. Second, insofar as the stage of one's destiny is the world, one needs to know as much as possible about the distinct characteristics of the human beings inhabiting other parts of the world, so that one is prepared to deal with them effectively and have them serve or cooperate in one's ends (such is prudence). Ultimately, through the information drawn from geography and then *taken up* here and there in anthropology, Kant's Occidental white audiences would get the sense that they alone have the honor to be expected—because they alone have all the requisite dispositions, talents, and so on—to participate as self-forming agents in the actual unfolding of humanity's progress toward its final destiny. Kant can endorse this conclusion without ever contradicting himself, precisely because his philosophical system is capacious and intricate enough to accommodate it. Figure 1.1 illustrated this point. And I will add even more connecting variables to the system in later chapters (especially Chapters 4 and 6).

## 1.6. Conclusion

This chapter sought to locate raciology in Kant's philosophical system. I began with an overview of the current state of the debate over his relation to racism, using Kleingeld's influential but controversial intervention as a springboard (section 1.2). I thereby foregrounded an assumption shared by all sides of the debate, according to which Kant's racist views logically contradict the literal reading of his moral universalism. Against this contradiction thesis, I highlighted three conceptual points. First, the universality of Kant's pure moral claims is *strict universality*, which is not to be conflated with mere generality. Second, this strict universality requires that human beings, if they figure in Kant's pure moral philosophy at all, be conceived only as rational beings *in abstracto*. The requisite abstraction is a real (as opposed

to merely logical) abstraction, as it sets aside the empirical conditions under which humans, as earthbound animals with rational capacities, may be moralized. Third, when Kant lays out the hopeful vision of the entire human *species* progressing toward this moral destiny, he is not thereby committed to the view that all *individuals* (or groups of individuals), as spatiotemporal particulars, can participate in the progress as agents. Therefore, Kant's moral universalism—whether one takes it to be about rational beings as such (*überhaupt*) or about humanity as a species—cannot be logically contradicted by racism, which concerns individual humans *in concreto* (section 1.3).

These conceptual points also laid the foundation for my positive account of where to locate Kant's raciology in his philosophical system. For the sake of analysis, I distinguished two parts of his raciology: *racialism*, which divides the human species into various races and assigns a distinct set of hereditary traits and dispositions to each race, and *racism*, whereby groups of people—on account of their racialized attributes—are excluded from such goods as the eligibility to play an agential role in a collective striving toward cultural or moral excellence (section 1.1). Kant's physical geography is a primary location for the former (section 1.4.1). The racialist account presented there is not yet racist by my definition. It gets the *racist upshot* only when Kant, having outlined a vision of human progress in his anthropology, uses his geographic knowledge to determine who of all the peoples on earth can carry out that vision as actual agents of history (section 1.4.2). He can exclude all nonwhite races from agential participations in this historical unfolding of human progress without contradicting either claims about rational beings in his pure moral philosophy or claims about "the human being" in his pragmatic anthropology. These two levels of discourse are separated by *real abstraction* from Kant's physical geography as well as from each other: each of the three levels operates with its own distinct notion of humanity, so that they are not even on the same plane for logical comparison (section 1.5).

I now conclude this chapter with two more points, as segue to later chapters. The first point concerns the very concept of racism. As I explained in the Introduction to this book, Kleingeld and many others have taken an individualistic approach in debating about whether, in what ways, and for how long Kant was racist. Kleingeld also reduces Kant's racism to racial hierarchism, which assigns different levels of intellectual powers and moral potentials to different races (I mentioned this in section 1.2). Many others, as we shall see in Chapter 2, also take the hierarchical notion of racism for

granted, although they disagree about what the supposed hierarchy comes down to. By contrast, my working definition of 'racism' in this chapter—in terms of race-based *exclusion* from certain goods—does not include the claim of racial hierarchy as a necessary or sufficient ingredient. Nor have I limited myself to the individualistic approach. I have drawn attention to the fact that Kant presented much of his raciology *as an educator* whose default audiences were Occidental whites. This fact suggests that we should go beyond, if not disregard, the question of whether Kant later retracted his own racist views. For, even if he did, he could never single-handedly undo the racialist and racist worldview that his geography and anthropology teachings and writings might have helped to form in the minds of his broadest audiences. I will explain this point and its implications in Chapter 2, by adopting a notion of racism that focuses on *ideological formation*.

The second point I want to make here is that, although I have established geography as a primary location for the racialist part of Kant's raciology, this is still only part of the story. The account of human differences in geography is a *descriptive* project by Kant's standard.[55] It does not explain why humans differ in the ways described. Kant takes up this *explanatory* project in his three essays on race, where he assumes the standpoint of a philosophical investigator of nature (*Naturforscher*) and seeks to uncover the natural causes of the phenomenal differences presented in geography. Only then does his racialism become a *scientific theory* of racial differences. This theoretical transformation, which hinges on a teleological conception of nature, will turn out to be crucial. Among other things, it gives Kant every reason to believe that the human differences he has detailed in his geography must be relevant to the historical unfolding of humanity's rational potentials. In other words, it offers a scientific pretense for the geographic account of racial differences to receive the racist upshot that I explained in this chapter. I will resume this point in Chapters 3 and 4.

[55] To say that Kant would see geography as a merely "descriptive" project, I am not suggesting that it is value neutral or normatively irrelevant. I thank Laura Papish for pressing me to clarify this point. As I have argued elsewhere (Lu-Adler 2022a) and will elaborate further in Chapters 3 and 4, a Kantian inquirer who collects and organizes data or "facts" about the world always does so from a certain standpoint, under the influence of certain principles and values, and in accordance with a certain methodology and conceptual framework. And the resulting descriptions of the world can have normative implications.

# 2

# "Racism" in What Sense?

## Reconceptualizing Kant's Relation to Racism

### 2.1. Introduction

For all the ink that has been poured over Kant's relation to racism, surprisingly little has been said about how best to understand the very concept of racism as it pertains to him. With a few exceptions, most scholars involved in the debate show two tendencies. First, they tend to equate racism with what Pauline Kleingeld calls "racial hierarchism" (2007: 574–75). This conceptualization of racism is widely shared by all sides of the debate, although they have no shared understanding of what the supposed racial "hierarchy" comes down to or what makes it "racist." As I shall explain in section 2.2, however, there is no need to assume that hierarchism is a constitutive element of racism. A claim of racial differences will suffice to underpin it (we will also see in Chapter 4 that this claim better captures how Kant himself presented his system of racial profiles in the 1780s, when he developed his mature theory of race).

The second common tendency is an individualistic or atomistic approach to racism. This approach prioritizes allegedly racist individuals as the sole or primary subjects of blame (on account of holding racist beliefs, for instance), of redemption (by retracting those beliefs), of psychological analysis (regarding the possibility of holding both racist beliefs and other beliefs that putatively contradict them), and so on, independently of how they are socially situated.[1] Kleingeld's "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race" (2007) again

[1] This characterization of the individualistic or atomistic approach to racism draws on Clevis Headley's critique of the approach (2000; also see Mills 2003). To clarify, the difference between the individualistic approach and—as it is typically contrasted with—the structuralist one is not that the former only talks about what is in the head or heart of individuals, whereas the latter only talks about structural matters. As Charles Mills has pointed out, theorists who adopt the individualistic approach may still talk about structural racism, but they will insist that our "theoretical starting-point for understanding and explaining" this form of racism must again be the ill will, for instance, in the individual's heart (2003: 30).

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represents this approach: it is preoccupied with the question of whether Kant continued to hold racist views until the end of his life. Lucy Allais's "Kant's Racism" (2016) is another prominent example: it seeks to uncover the moral-psychological mechanism by which Kant, at least before he supposedly had second thoughts, could hold racist views that allegedly contradict his own moral teachings.[2]

Although the individualistic or atomistic approach may still have its value (I will talk about its limited use in the conclusion to the book), it is time to move beyond it and take a more holistic approach. Following this approach, I will still interrogate Kant's raciology. But I will treat it as a product of his explicitly stated philosophical *methods* and *principles* (as opposed to unverifiable personal intentions or psychological mechanisms for instance); and it will appear as an integral part of the broader racial *knowledge production* and racist *ideology formation* that took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries against the backdrop of colonialism and race-based chattel slavery (Chapters 3 and 4). And I will shed light on how the racialist and racist worldview that Kant helped to shape—by inventing a modern scientific concept of race and sharpening racial boundaries, presenting denigrating imageries of nonwhites to his audiences, and intervening in debates that would determine the inclusion or exclusion of nonwhites in or from certain institutions—could have a lasting impact (Chapters 5 and 6). My ultimate goal is not to pass moralized judgments about Kant himself for holding and teaching racist views, but to clarify the status of those views as a considerable part of modern history and an ineffaceable aspect of Kant's legacy. This clarification in turn shows Kant/Kantian *scholars today* that they have a special burden to reckon with that legacy in their research and teaching (Conclusion).

The present chapter makes the case for this holistic approach in three steps. The first step is to analyze the various interpretations of Kant's "racism," so as

[2] Allais also considers the social context—particularly "unjust structural relations"—in which a racist mind operates. She thereby gives a nod to theorists like Mills who conceptualize racism "as an ideology that relates to structures of power and not merely something to be located in 'personal prejudice.'" But she does so mainly to explain why those individuals who are complicit in racial injustice, including Kant, have "a *psychological need* to form attitudes, patterns of interpretation and moral salience that dehumanize those who [their] ways of life fail to respect" (2016: 30, emphasis added). Kant, however, was not just a typical individual who happened to be a member of the dominant race in an already racist society, a situation that would purportedly induce the psychological need Allais described. Rather, as I shall explain in section 2.4, he occupied a *privileged social location* that made him particularly well positioned to play an instrumental and transformative role, along with myriad other historical and structural forces, in the nascent formation of modern racist ideology. This attention to differential positionality, as we shall see in sections 2.3.2 and 2.4, is a hallmark of the anti-individualistic approach that Mills and many others represent.

to foreground different assumptions about this concept regarding its proper referent and scope of application (section 2.2). I sort these into *cognitive* versus *attitudinal* and *wide-scope* versus *narrow-scope* conceptions of racism (section 2.3.1).

The second step is to give a brief overview of the competing ways in which race theorists outside of Kant scholarship have conceptualized racism. This allows me to tease out a further distinction—between *moralistic* and *nonmoralistic* conceptions of racism (regarding whether it is inherently immoral)—and to highlight Tommie Shelby's nonmoralistic conception of racism as ideology. By my analysis, none of these conceptions of racism is rich enough to capture the roles that Kant, as a prominent philosopher *and* a lifelong educator, could play in the formation of modern racist ideology (section 2.3.2).

For this reason, I take the third and final step of considering Sally Haslanger's critical revision of Shelby's account and the resulting notion of *racism as ideological formation*. This notion will allow us to transcend the standard individualistic queries about Kant's racism and consider the roles that he, in virtue of his position in a nexus of power relations and meaning makers, could play in assisting—intentionally or not—the nascent formation of modern racist ideology in the eighteenth century (section 2.4). Accordingly, we will have to update the questions that guide our investigation of Kant's relation to racism (section 2.5).

## 2.2. Characterizations of Kant's "Racism": A Preliminary Overview

Like Kleingeld, most scholars who have written about Kant's racial views tend to reduce his alleged racism to racial hierarchism. They have offered a range of characterizations of the supposed racial hierarchy. A brief overview of these characterizations and of some arguments against the hierarchical reading will reveal the need for a greater conceptual clarity about 'racism' and how we use this term to talk about Kant's views on race.

On one reading, racial hierarchism commits Kant to viewing nonwhites as less than fully human. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, for instance, attributes to Kant a "hierarchical chart of the superior to the inferior hues of the skin": whiteness is the "ideal skin color," and the other colors are comparatively "superior or inferior as they approximate whiteness." To be more

exact, Kant is said to maintain "a hierarchical *interpretation* of these color differences" on the basis of "presumed differing grades of *Talent*." A distinction is thereby drawn between humanity proper and a heritable subhuman status: "the so-called subhuman, primitive and characterological inferiority of the American Indian, the African, or the Asian is a biologically and metaphysically inherited (arche)type"; by contrast, "humanity *proper* is embodied only in the history of European life formation" (1995: 217–18, 225).

Likewise, Charles Mills submits that Kant constructed "a human hierarchy of racialized superiors and inferiors: white Europeans, yellow Asians, black Africans, red Amerindians," treating nonwhites as *Untermenschen* or subpersons (2005: 173). A belief in this (or some other) kind of racial hierarchy is a constitutive element of racism as Mills understands it:

> racism is minimally the conjunction of three beliefs: (1) that the human race is subdivided into discrete "races"; (2) that these races are hierarchically arranged; and (3) that this hierarchy is grounded in particular racially differentiated traits and tendencies. . . . the "superior" race is seen as more intelligent and generally of better moral character than the "inferior" race. (2014: 127)

The hierarchism built into this account of racism is not just the claim "that there is a hierarchy of abilities and moral traits." What makes it "racist" is the further claim that the subordinate races somehow "do not reach *some threshold level* taken to be a minimal prerequisite for meriting equal treatment" (2014: 129). Whites alone stand above the purported threshold. Thus, racism functions as "a normative system in its own right that makes whiteness a prerequisite for full personhood and generally . . . limits nonwhites to 'subperson' status" (2005: 170).

Many ascribe racial hierarchism to Kant without thereby committing him to viewing nonwhites as subhumans or subpersons. Even here, we can find a variety of ways to describe the purported racial hierarchy—as a "hierarchy of talents and potentials" (Hedrick 2008: 246), a "hierarchy of worth" (Park 2013: 94), a "natural, God-willed hierarchy of human types, possessing markedly different capacities for culture and civilization" (McCarthy 2009: 51; see Valdez 2017: 831–32; Basevich 2020: 224), a de facto hierarchical relationship of whites to nonwhites that became naturalistically justifiable with Kant's invention of "race" (Barkhaus 1994), and so on. Yet another proposal is that "Kant's concept of race undergoes a transformation" with respect to

hierarchism: it starts off as an explicitly hierarchical one, then takes on a nonhierarchical form (in the mid-1780s), and finally arrives at a teleological view of certain racially differentiated characteristics that Kant uses "to confirm [though not to affirm] power relations and differences in the political world" (Eberl 2019: 407; see Muthu 2003: 181–84; Marwah 2019: 102–9).

Yet others deny that hierarchism is a constitutive or defining feature of Kant's racism at all (at any stage of its development). Bernard Boxill, for instance, differentiates ranking and hierarchy and argues that, while Kant sometimes ranks the races in terms of superior versus inferior intelligence among other characteristics, "a ranking is not necessarily a hierarchy, and being more intelligent than another does not mean that one has any authority over him." Only a racial "hierarchy" in the proper sense of this term, Boxill submits, could justify such forms of racial exploitation as colonialism and slavery; yet there is no clear evidence that Kant ever saw colonialism or slavery as "permissible," even when he failed to condemn those practices (2017: 46).[3]

If Boxill thereby means to suggest that Kant was never a racist in the most egregious sense of using racial hierarchism to justify colonialism or slavery, this still leaves room for seeing him as a racist in some other sense. Boxill does not explicitly make this verdict. He simply refers to Kant's "racial views" throughout the paper, which are wide-ranging:

> Kant played a leading role in the construction of a scientific concept of race, argued that the white race was superior to the other races, and was contemptuous of the black and Native American races and indifferent to their mistreatment. (2017: 44)

Boxill finds these views "offensive and ill-considered," without straightforwardly calling them racist. He does tacitly refer to Kant as a racist, though, while inquiring what might have induced him "to hold his appalling racial views—against every reasonable and decent principle or feeling." As far as Boxill can tell, the usual explanations of how people become "racists"—such as the need to justify the material advantages they gain at the expense of other races—do not seem applicable here (2017: 47). The explanation that Boxill goes on to elaborate indicates that he sees Kant's racism as a matter of cold

[3] If one scrutinizes the logic of this argument, one will recognize that it is either invalid or obviously unsound.

indifference to the well-being of nonwhites, as is reflected in his apparent lack of concern about the possible "genocide of the red and black races," a possibility suggested by his teleological theory of history (2017: 52).[4]

John Harfouch likewise rejects the hierarchical interpretation, albeit for a different reason: Kantian racism is "not a racism of inferiority," but "a racism of non-being." Treating a race as inferior at least suggests that they possess some degree of being, if only by reducing them to "a kind of subhuman that stands to be exploited as an object." Harfouch's Kant, by contrast, holds that nonwhites, particularly the Tahitians, exist "without any ground [or purpose] whatsoever." This distinction between racial inferiority and racial non-being, Harfouch urges, is "as radical as it is disastrous": if an inferior being must nevertheless be preserved as a useful object of exploitation, considering nonwhites as "non-beings that cannot be instrumentalized" points to total annihilation. Such is the genocidal "logic" of a racism of non-being: what is "nonexistent" is "thereby disposable" (2018: 151–53).[5] Harfouch's claim is not that this form of racism is the only one ascribable to Kant, but that, "while other racisms are operative in Kant's corpus, one form that is unique to his thinking is based on a racial mind-body union with neither reason nor being" (2018: xxvi–xxvii).

Regardless of what one thinks of Boxill's or Harfouch's argument against the hierarchical account of Kant's alleged racism, one can agree that there is no need to treat racial hierarchism as a defining element of racism (be it Kant's or anyone else's). An assumption of racialized *differences* suffices to underwrite it.[6] Nor does racism have to involve any explicit or tacit

[4] It is misleading to lump together Kant's views on "the red and black races." As I have argued elsewhere (Lu-Adler 2022b, 2022c) and as we shall see in Chapter 4, Kant holds importantly different views about these two races and their historical fates.

[5] This interpretation makes a few problematic moves. First, as I already suggested in Chapter 2 and will explain further in Chapter 4, Kant need not and does not deny that nonwhites possess the capacity for reason qua potential, in the form of germs (*Keime*). It is just that, in his view, such germs will remain undeveloped or underdeveloped in those races due to certain natural impediments, such as the lack of immediate drives and the inability to form abstract concepts. Second, while Kant's remarks about the Tahitians in certain contexts suggest that their existence is purposeless, this does not entail genocidal violence to be committed by the white race (I will explain his alternative in Chapter 4, according to which populations like the Tahitians will become nearly if not completely extinct on their own). Finally, one cannot generalize from Kant's few remarks about the Tahitians to his view of all nonwhites. We will see in Chapters 4 and 6 that his accounts of the three nonwhite races are significantly different from one another.

[6] Kant's account of gender differences helps to illustrate this point: of the two sexes, neither is superior to the other; it is just that nature, for the sake of humanity, intends them to be different—the woman to be "beautiful" and the man "sublime," in intellectual and aesthetic qualities; this difference in turn determines, among other things, their places in society—the woman bound for the domestic sphere and the man, for the civil or political one (GSE, 2: 228–43; Anth, 7: 303–11; V-Anth/Fried, 25: 697–722; V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1188–94; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1392–98).

endorsement of racial exploitation or violence. Here is a reasonable alternative, which identifies the doxastic basis of racism simply as a conjunction of beliefs about racial differences and racial preferences.

> Racists are those who explicitly or implicitly ascribe racial characteristics of others which purportedly differ from their own and others like them; these characteristics may be biological or social. . . . They [also] assign racial preferences, . . . or express desired, intended, or actual inclusions or exclusions, entitlements or restrictions [solely based on race]. (Goldberg 1990: 319)

On this account, racism "need not be about exploitation in the strong sense of forcing, coercing, or manipulating racial others to maximize surplus value for the ruling racial class." Rather, its defining feature is a racially based distribution of "social power," whereby the dominant race is "in a position to exclude [racial] others from (primary) social goods, including rights, to prevent their access, or participation, or expression, or simply to demean or diminish the other's self-respect." Moreover, the racist need not "appeal to superiority and inferiority as justification for the exclusion(s)." The justificatory appeal can simply be to certain racial differences (Goldberg 1990: 319).

On this account, a mere ascription of racial differences need not be racist, although it can be used to justify, say, racist distributions of goods. I suggested this much with the distinction between *racialism* and *racism* in Chapter 1. The terminology is from Kwame Anthony Appiah. On Appiah's account, racialism is the view that "there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race"; and these characteristics are taken to constitute "some sort of racial essence." According to Appiah, racialism by itself is not necessarily dangerous; it is "false" and, as such, is "a cognitive rather than a moral problem"; it is nonetheless "the basis of a great deal of moral error and the source of a great deal of human suffering."[7] As for racism, it can be "extrinsic"

[7] This is only one way of talking about "racialism." It is admittedly limiting, but it suffices for my analysis of Kant's raciology all the way through Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, when I consider the afterlives of race concepts, I will pivot to a broader notion of racialism, which need not be a cognitive (or moral) mistake. See Taylor 2022: 28–51 for a helpful account of the history and changing forms of racialism.

or "intrinsic." Extrinsic racists "make moral distinctions between members of different races, because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities," such as honesty, courage, and intelligence. An extrinsic racist would or should abandon their racism when confronted with clear evidence that the alleged difference in morally relevant qualities do not exist. By contrast, intrinsic racists "differentiate morally between members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence." To them, evidence about the actual qualities of a racial other—for example, that this person is "capable of great moral, intellectual, or cultural achievements"—does not matter (1989: 44–45).

Whereas some are skeptical about the psychological possibility of "intrinsic racism" (see, for instance, Mills 2014: 127), this type of racism is precisely the charge that Naomi Zack levels against Kant. Borrowing Appiah's terminology, Zack attributes both racialism and racism to Kant, but interprets his racialism in such a way that racism seems to follow as an irrevocable result. Kant qua racial essentialist, she claims, not only believed in "the existence of human biological races" but also "assumed that racial essences existed as permanent links between biology and culture" (2002: 23). By thus necessitating the link between biology and culture, Zack's Kant also rendered his racism so "deep" that it would resist both empirical-evidential and theoretical-philosophical interventions (2002: 18). He was "an *intrinsic* racist," then, "insofar as there was nothing in his other philosophical commitments to restrain him from asserting that the connection [between biology and culture] was necessary" (2002: 23). This is a grave moral charge, considering that Zack has already associated racism with "malice" (2002: 9).

At this point, the reader may wonder whether it is helpful to use 'racism' to talk about Kant or his philosophy at all. For one, as we have seen, this term has no clearly shared meaning or referent in the secondary literature on Kant's racial views. For another, to today's ears, it is a term more or less loaded with condemnatory moral judgments and sentiments. What we, as ordinary-language users, associate with 'racism' today, which very often suffers from conceptual inflation, referential ambiguity, and moral overload (more on this in section 2.3.2), may in fact impede our understanding of Kant's racial views by blinding us to the larger context in which they took shape. Zack opened her paper with a reference to now: "The kinds of oppression and discrimination that are now associated with *racism* have a longer history than the idea of race" (2002: 9). Similarly, Harfouch's analysis of Kant's racism was driven

by the concern with "the phenomenon of a racial non-being as it manifests itself in the [present] experiences and writings of the targets of racism." That is, Harfouch was "led back to Kant" by a genealogical investigation of that phenomenon—by asking, specifically, "what, if any, experience of racism is inaugurated by Kant's philosophy?" (2018: 154–55). Some may dismiss this presentist approach as wrongheaded. One may argue, for instance, that it is a mistake for an author today to interpret the past, including past thinkers like Kant, "in terms of a morally charged conception of racism" or, more generally, "in terms of the concepts, values and understanding of the author's own generation" (Banton 2010: 138; see Bernasconi 2010 for reply).

Yet 'racism,' as a concept for philosophical and historical analyses, need not be morally charged. Nor is it necessarily a mistake for historians of philosophy to be motivated by concerns with lived experiences of the marginalized or violated races here and now. With these points in mind, I will look for a conceptualization of racism that facilitates a clearer and more fruitful understanding of Kant's relation to it. I will begin with a closer look at some of the options offered by interpreters of Kant (section 2.3.1), before turning to some representative analyses of racism by race theorists outside of Kant scholarship (section 2.3.2). My eventual goal is to go beyond the individualistic and moralistic approaches that have dominated the discourse on Kant and racism (section 2.4).

## 2.3. Which "Racism"?—In Search of a Better Way to Conceptualize Kant's Relation to Racism

### 2.3.1. How Interpreters of Kant Have Conceptualized Racism

We can sort conceptualizations of Kant's racism roughly into two (nonexclusive) varieties in terms of where they locate racism: does racism consist in one's *attitudes* toward or in one's *beliefs* about the racial others? The attitudinal conception locates racism in certain noncognitive attitudes one has toward others on the basis of race, ranging from hatred to callous indifference about the latter's well-being. Boxill (2017) hinted at this conception when he described Kant's apparent lack of concern about the possibility of genocide of the red and black races. So did Zack (2002), when she associated

racism with malice and saw Kant as an intrinsic racist whose racism is irresponsive to any doxastic interventions.

The cognitive conception, by contrast, locates racism in certain beliefs about races. Those who interpreted Kant's racism in terms of racial hierarchism were mostly working with this conception.[8] It is also reflected in Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill's following acknowledgment of Kant's racism (in spite of the reference to "attitudes"):

> Kant expressed various beliefs and attitudes that are aptly called racist, in that they falsely (and perhaps culpably) affirm belief in the inferiority of non-white races and so are liable to encourage policies and attitudes towards them that are unjust, contemptuous, and callous. His failings, we suggest, were not only faults of commission (what he said) but also faults of omission (what he did not say but should have). (2001: 449)[9]

If Hill and Boxill regard Kant's "various" racist beliefs as isolated (or isolatable) and barely theorized statements scattered here and there in his corpus, Mills sees something more systematic. On his reading, Kantian racism, as one of the "most important historic instantiations" of racism, is "not just an aggregation of propositions but propositions ideationally elaborated and synthesized into a *theory*"; it should therefore be "conceptualized as an ideology—a set of ideas, beliefs, norms, and underlying assumptions whose purpose is *explanatory* and *justificatory*" (2014: 128; see Eze 1995: 231).

Scholars who assume a cognitive conception of racism are mainly interested in the following question when they talk about Kant: how do his racist beliefs relate to *other beliefs* that make up his system, especially those with which they appear to be in direct tension? What Kleingeld called "inconsistent universalist" and "consistent inegalitarian" readings, which I analyzed in Chapter 1, represent two contrary answers to this question. The perceived

[8] As a clear exception, Allais develops a Kantian account of racism as race-based disrespect that blends volitional and emotional as well as cognitive components (2016: 21–23).

[9] Hill and Boxill may be operating with a hybrid notion of racism that combines attitudinal and cognitive elements. At one point, to show that "Kant's racial theory is not racist simply because it claims that there are superior and inferior races," the authors stipulate the following: "A racial theory is racist only if it relies on a culpable neglect of evidence that could have disproved it, or expresses or encourages contempt or disregard for people because of the race they are alleged to belong to" (2001: 452). They also gesture toward this attitudinal conception while discussing the relation between "visceral racism"—as some sort of "gut-level feelings"—and the Kantian-rationalist moral deliberation. In this context, they describe "racial antagonisms [as] a paradigm of visceral attitudes that did not stem from reason" (2001: 464).

tension between racist beliefs and Kant's other beliefs is also what has prompted some to seek a psychological explanation of how he could hold both at the same time. Allais (2016, 2019) uses Kant's own theory of self-deception to spell out the relevant psychological mechanism.[10] Similarly, when Boxill asks, "What could have driven the great philosopher to such madness?" he is trying to understand how Kant, being such a brilliant thinker, could possibly subscribe to the racist beliefs as he did. After all, Boxill figures, there were no credible facts to support those beliefs, such as the belief "that black and red people were stupid and lazy"; while some of the travelogues at the time denigrated those two races, they "were like today's tabloids," not to be taken seriously by any "reasonable person";[11] at any rate, Kant's own "principle of respect for human beings should have induced him to closely examine the evidence for blacks and red stupidity." Therefore, Boxill surmises, it must be due to certain cognitive biases that Kant arrived at those beliefs against every "reasonable" principle. Specifically, he might have been blinded by his commitment to a philosophical theory—his teleological theory of history—that "he had invented, labored on, was proud of, and was convinced was true" (2017: 47).[12]

There is a second way to sort the conceptualizations of Kant's racism encountered so far, namely in terms of referential scopes. Some interpreters work with a *narrow-scope* conception by focusing on the most egregious cases of racism. Boxill (2017) was targeting this conception when he criticized Kleingeld and many of her critics alike for ascribing racial hierarchism to Kant, insofar as 'hierarchy' suggests domination and therefore serves to justify such forms of racial exploitation as colonialism and slavery. Kleingeld (2007) was using the narrow-scope conception when she read the later Kant's supposed condemnation of colonialism and slavery as the primary indicator of his eventual retraction of racism. So was Harfouch (2018), when he singled

[10] Allais does not mean thereby to absolve Kant from *moral* blames for his racism. To the contrary, she questions "the possibility of a genuinely morally innocent, merely empirically mistaken [or epistemically reprehensible] racism" (2016: 23).

[11] This dismissive claim about travel reports is overly simplistic. As I have argued elsewhere (Lu-Adler 2022a) and as we shall see in Chapter 4, Kant had reasons—as controversial and problematic as they may be—to trust those reports as a genre and draw from them the data he needed to study human variations as a natural philosopher.

[12] See Marwah 2022 for a more recent study of the pivotal function of Kant's teleological framework—not as something that blindsided Kant, however, but as the bridge between his moral theory and his racialized account of human differences. I also suggested this much in Chapter 1, and I will briefly return to it in Chapter 4.

out racism of non-being, with its genocidal logic, as the racism unique to Kant's thinking.

By contrast, a *wide-scope* conception of racism encompasses all forms of what Mills calls "racial exclusion." This may be an exclusion of nonwhites "from full membership in the moral/political community" by systematically treating them as subpersons (Mills 2005: 181, 190). It may also be a race-based exclusion from "(primary) social goods" such as rights (Goldberg 1990; 1993: 90–116). Or it may appear as a particular kind of "disrespect" toward racial others: one may recognize these racial others as persons and yet fail to "respond appropriately" to their personhood by, say, disregarding "the valid moral claims grounded in their personhood" (Allais 2016: 21, 23).[13]

Whether one construes racism widely or narrowly can result in very different conclusions about Kant's raciology in a given period. This point is most clearly reflected in the controversy over Kleingeld's argument that Kant changed his racist mind in the 1790s: even if she was right that Kant finally renounced racism in the egregious forms of colonialism and chattel slavery (I mentioned challenges to this claim in Chapter 1), her Kant might still be racist according to a wide-scope conception. At any rate, to borrow a phrase from Harfouch, given the wide-ranging ways in which Kant's racism shows up as well as the severity of its most egregious forms, "put[ting] the genie back in bottle" would likely take much more than a few putatively anticolonial and antislavery statements here and there in his very late works (2018: 155).

What can we conclude from this overview of the various ways in which interpreters have conceptualized Kant's racism? I agree with Harfouch that, when we look at Kant's case, we should bear in mind that "racism is hardly monolithic and it cannot be distilled to a simple formula and then wholly attributed to any one thinker" (2018: xvii).[14] It is also the case, however, that which of the many notions of racism one chooses to highlight can determine how one frames and addresses one's research questions, what (if any) verdict one reaches about Kant and/or his philosophy, and what (if anything) one thinks we should do about the findings. So far, as Harfouch sees the scholarly debate about Kant and racism, it has largely centered on such questions as "Was Kant racist?" and "Did Kant's racism intersect with his critical

[13] Allais builds her account on the notion of racism as disrespect (or disregard) that is familiar to race theorists outside of Kant scholarship (Glasgow 2009; also see Taylor 2022: 58–62).

[14] Theorists disagree about the prospect of a single account of racism that captures its nature in a monistic, universally applicable formula. See, for instance, Headley 2006 versus Glasgow 2009.

works?"[15] We should not dwell on such questions, Harfouch contends, because answers to them would make little difference "to the lives of those in the crosshairs of racist violence today" (2018: 154). To this I add that, insofar as the standard approach to those questions is individualistic or atomistic in the way I explained in section 2.1, dwelling on them can blind us to the dynamic and intricate ways in which racism might have taken shape in the *nexus of power relations* in which Kant was embedded. Foregrounding the latter may be far more important to the antiracist aspiration that, in my view, should be the ultimate motive behind all inquiries about Kant's relation to racism. It will also more accurately reflect how Kant himself philosophized as a historically situated scholar and educator.

Before I elaborate on these points (in section 2.4), it will prove instructive to consider a few analyses of racism by race theorists outside of Kant scholarship. This will shed further light on the contrasts between attitudinal and cognitive and between narrow-scope and wide-scope conceptions of racism. Debates about these conceptions will also raise a question, which I indicated toward the end of section 2.2, about whether the charge of "racism" necessarily carries moral condemnation or whether we should look for a nonmoralistic way of conceptualizing it.

### 2.3.2. How Some Race Theorists Have Analyzed Racism

Among the race theorists, attitudinal and cognitive conceptions of racism—besides a third, behavioral conception (the "Act-Centered Theory" explained in Philips 1984)—are answers to what is known as the "location problem." It is the problem of figuring out the primary seat of racism: is it fundamentally located in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors (Glasgow 2009: 69)?[16] I already

[15] This question ("Did Kant's racism intersect with his critical works?"), as Kant scholars tend to handle it, reflects an anxiety about the specter that Kant's racism might contaminate the supposed core of his critical philosophy, especially his revered moral theory. The desire to defend this core from the penetration of racism seems to be driving the artificial and preemptive separation of what constitutes the *center* of Kant's system and what is merely *peripheral*, whereby his raciology is consigned to the latter sphere. What is problematic, then, is not the very call to investigate the relation between Kant's raciology and other parts of his system (I will do a great deal of this investigation in the next four chapters). What is unacceptable is the tendency to marginalize Kant's raciology and dismiss (or minimize) its philosophical significance or hermeneutical relevance *in advance*. I will return to this point at the end of this chapter.

[16] One solution to the location problem is not to limit racism to *any* specific location. The conception of racism as disrespect is one example: it is purported to be location neutral (Glasgow 2009: 80–81; see Taylor 2022: 57–62).

mentioned two versions of the cognitive account (Appiah 1989; Goldberg 1990). Jorge Garcia is a leading champion for the attitudinal approach, locating racism in "the contents of [the racist's] will, broadly conceived." On this account (variously called "volitional," "desiderative," "emotive," and "motivational"), what makes racism "always and inherently wrong" is that it consists in some form of racially based disregard or ill will: the racist is opposed or hostile to, or simply "cares nothing (or too little)" about, someone's needs and well-being because of race. Thus, racism is a (conscious or unconscious) moral vice "in the hearts of individuals—in their likes and dislikes, their hopes and wants, their preferences and choices." It need not take the form of racial hatred: "callous indifference" suffices. Nor does it have to involve actions: "Those who fail to act—because of lack of power, opportunity, or for other reasons—can nevertheless be racists." As for beliefs, they are racist "insofar as they are informed by racial disregard" (2001: 134–39; see Garcia 1996, to which the accounts mentioned below are direct responses).[17]

This last point, which derives the racist character of certain beliefs from the quality of the believer's volitional content, is worth elaborating, as it will eventually bear on our assessment of Kant's relation to racism. For this purpose, I turn to Thomas Schmid's argument in favor of a motivational definition of 'racism' as "the infliction of unequal consideration, motivated by the desire to dominate, based on race alone" (1996: 34). As Schmid sees it, a "belief in the essential factual inequality of the races," for instance, is "not necessarily racist." Rather, it is racist "only to the extent that it was arrived at or retained through the domination motivation (which distorted the process of belief-formation, resulting in a form of self-deception)." So here is how to tell a true racist from a merely apparent one: "the merely 'cognitive racist' or believer in the essential factual inequality of the races will reveal himself as a 'true racist' if, when presented with significant evidence contrary to that belief, he [self-deceivingly] turns away from the evidence so as to retain the attitude which justifies his domination" (1996: 36–37).

Underpinning this account is Schmid's view that the "principle of human equality," the violation of which is characteristic of racism, comprises two distinct subprinciples. One is *equal perception*, "the perception of all humans (and ethnic and racial groups) as essentially factually equal, capable of self-government and rational judgment." The other is *equal consideration*, "the

[17] See Urquidez 2020: 325–65 for a critique of Garcia's theory of racism that also helps to illuminate some of the responses that I am discussing in this chapter.

willingness to extend to all humans and human groups the same basic rights, and not to seek to institute conditions of perpetual superiority over them." Cognitive racists violate the first principle, but not the second, if they have no intention to institute or preserve the practice of racial subjugation (1996: 34–35). This intention is precisely what makes someone a true racist: racism is "not a function of intellect so much as of the will to oppress and dominate another people, based on their race." The motivational approach focuses exclusively on this "core of racism as a system of domination" (1996: 38). This narrow reference is practically significant, Schmid argues. Otherwise, extending the charge of racism to the "widespread human preference for people of their own racial or ethnic group" (1996: 38), for instance, would "weaken the *moral weight* of the word, and fail to identify what is truly distinct and morally most significant about racism" (1996: 32, emphasis added).

Thus, Schmid favors the motivational approach "at least insofar as we are concerned with identifying the type of racism that is morally most objectionable" (1996: 34). He has thereby expressed a commonly shared sentiment behind philosophical analyses of racism, namely the need to capture what is *distinctly immoral* about it. As Garcia puts it, "an adequate account of racism needs to attend . . . to matters of moral virtue and vice" and make clear "why the term 'racism' is properly pejorative" by, say, showing that what constitutes racism "is inherently contrary to the moral virtues of benevolence and justice, and often to others as well" (2001: 134; see Glasgow 2009: 65, 77). The challenge, as Lawrence Blum notes, is that the term 'racism' has become "the central or even only notion used to mark morally suspect behavior, attitude, and social practice regarding race" and that its overuse tends to hinder productive conversations about racial matters (2000: 206). Against this backdrop, Blum pushes for a narrow-scope conception of racism "to protect the distinct moral opprobrium of the accusation of 'racism' from conceptual inflation and moral overload, as well as from categorical drift and confusion." He distinguishes what is *racial* and what is *racist*: not all instances of racial insensitivity, ignorance, exclusion, homogenization, and so on should be called racist, even though they may still be causes for "moral concern"; instead, we should "confine 'racism' to especially egregious wrongs"—be they manifested cognitively as racial inferiorization, or attitudinally as racial antipathy (2000: 217–18; see Blum 2002: 1–32).[18]

[18] On Blum's critique of the conceptual inflation of racism, see Urquidez 2020: 256–64.

Tommie Shelby, defending a wide-scope cognitive conception of racism (against Blum and Garcia respectively), rejects the assumption that racism is by definition wrong. He questions the demand that an adequate philosophical analysis of racism must preserve "the descriptive core and condemnatory force" of ordinary uses of this term, when the ordinary usage is "so vague or inconsistent that moral appraisal lacks a distinct and steady target" (2002: 412). Shelby favors a nonmoralistic approach, which begins with a morally neutral definition of 'racism' with the sole purpose of identifying its referent.[19] While all forms of racism properly so-called are prima facie a cause for moral concern, not every one of them necessarily represents a *moral* failing, let alone a grave one. Furthermore, what makes racism a cause for moral concern lies neither in the hearts of racist individuals nor in their personal beliefs about race, but in its *social* function as an *ideology*. That is, as a system of misleading, illusory, or distorted beliefs and implicit assumptions about "races," racism can (re)produce unjust social arrangements—various forms of racial domination, exploitation, and exclusion—by concealing the fact of their unjustness (2002: 413–17; see 2014: 61, 66–71).[20]

In thus defending a wide-scope cognitive or ideological conception of racism, Shelby has problematized not only the presumption of immorality undergirding previous analyses but also what Clevis Headley (2000), critiquing Schmid, calls an "individualistic" or "atomistic" approach to racism or what Mills (2003), critiquing Garcia, simply calls "atomic individualism." The conception of racism as ideology, as Shelby presents it, is "not concerned with the mental life of individuals per se," but with a widely shared system of beliefs, with a form of "social consciousness." Racist beliefs qua ideological beliefs form a prima facie coherent network of thoughts, where one belief is "a part of a wider view of things, a component of a larger systematic outlook" (2003: 158–60).[21] For example,

[19] As Mills helpfully clarifies the nature of this nonmoralistic approach, the "alternative to a moralized account [such as Garcia's] is not an amoral account." Rather, it emphasizes the difference between two spheres of inquiry (descriptive versus normative): "Moral judgments about racism and racialized social structures should certainly be made . . . but these should be left as open questions, not definitional prerequisites" (2003: 61).

[20] This account of racism as ideology, Shelby clarifies, "does not preclude regarding things other than beliefs as racist. It simply means . . . that we understand these other forms or expressions of racism in terms of ideology, i.e., in terms of ideology's main characteristics or effects" (2014: 67).

[21] Shelby may not be committed to the view that racist ideologies require a systematic or coherent outlook. I thank Laura Papish for this point. See Papish 2015: 11–12.

> the view that blacks are inherently of low intelligence is part of a wideranging and interconnected set of beliefs that includes, on the one hand, beliefs about the laziness, aggressiveness, and unreliability of black people, and on the other, beliefs about their natural musicality, athletic talent, and sexual prowess. Such beliefs are in turn based on the view that these and other such socially significant characteristics are transmitted through biological reproduction. (2003: 159)

To the beholders, such ideological beliefs often appear to have "compelling explanatory or justificatory power." They significantly influence how people "understand their social life" and construct their "personal and social identities." And they impact actions and practices by "*mediating* social interaction." In the case of racist ideology, this impact comes down to its contribution to establishing or reinforcing oppressive social relations and practices (2003: 159–60). Importantly, Shelby argues, racist ideology serves this social function "by way of illusion and misrepresentation" (2003: 174). It does so by, for example, making those oppressive relations and practices appear legitimate or natural (hence unavoidable), whereby it blinds people to ways in which they may be complicit in bringing about or perpetuating those relations. In short, the cognitively defective character of racist ideology makes its oppressive social function possible (2003: 165–66, 173–77).[22]

Mills, as a rare interpreter who gives a (nonmoralistic) philosophical analysis of "racism" before using it to theorize about Kant's raciology, has explicitly argued for conceptualizing the racism associated with Kant "as an ideology" (2014: 130)—as "a set of ideas, beliefs, norms, and underlying assumptions" that serve to explain and legitimize racist practices (2014: 128). Similarly, Eze talks about "the cultural-ideological and the geopolitical significance of Kant's raciology" (1995: 240n139), ascribing to it

[22] Shelby lists various types of "cognitive error" that are characteristic of ideological thinking: "oversimplification, neglect of pertinent facts, . . . misuse of 'authoritative' sources, hasty generalization," to name a few. He also describes ideologies as beliefs that agents hold with a "false consciousness"—under "unconscious influence of noncognitive motives"—and hence irrationally (2003: 166, 170). These elements of Shelby's cognitive account, Sally Haslanger suggests, point to "an individualistic approach: whether a set of beliefs is ideological is partly a matter of content, partly a matter of social function/effects, and partly a matter of how the individua(s) in question hold(s) them" (2017: 9n8). The last condition, Haslanger also notes, is absent from Shelby 2014. In the latter text, Shelby simply states: ideologies, as attributed "not . . . to individuals but to social groups, whole societies, or historical eras," are "commonly held beliefs and implicit judgments that legitimate stratified social orders or imperial projects" (2014: 67).

"various conscious and unconscious ideological functions" (1995: 216). On this reading, Kant contributed something "of original consequence to . . . the problem of European ethnocentrism" by offering "the strongest, if not the only, sufficiently articulated *theoretical philosophical* justification of the superior/inferior classification of 'races of men' of any other European writer before him" (1995: 231). Eze means thereby to counter any temptation to see Kant's racial views as "simply a provincialist's recycling of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, fueled . . . by the travel narratives of eighteenth-century Europeans who had economic and imperial political and cultural ambitions in other lands" (1995: 230).

It is also the case, however, that Kant developed his racial views at a time when European economic and political domination had been more or less established and when Eurocentric travel narratives and hasty generalizations about non-Europeans, be they malignant or not, were prevalent (as we shall see in Chapter 4). Being a thinker and educator who frowns upon scholastic pedantry (in the pejorative sense) but applauds worldly knowledge and broadly informed pragmatism (to be explained below), those real-world situations and narratives must have somehow influenced his thinking and teaching, including his very decision to take up such topics as racial classification. "We think and act as participants in practices," to quote Sally Haslanger (2017: 12). The "we" includes all of us. Kant cannot be an exception. The question to ask here is not simply whether he was "Ein Kind seiner Zeit" (Willaschek 2020a). Such a question either has all too obvious an answer—all of us are, in one way or another, products of our times and circumstances—or risks trapping us in a false dichotomy, such as the one suggested in Eze's remarks above.

More plausibly, with his raciology Kant was neither a provincialist merely regurgitating existent stereotypes nor an originator of a racist ideology in the sense of a clearly articulated system of beliefs that serve to explain, justify, and thereby reinforce racist practices. As Mills puts it, to call a theory "*ideological*, in the pejorative sense," is to see it as "a set of group ideas that reflect and contribute to perpetuating illicit group privilege" (2017: 73). The twice occurred qualifier 'group' conveys a key feature of the ideological conception of racism: it involves, first, a sort of collective or *social agent* that beholds the relevant set of ideas, beliefs, and so on ("thoughts" for short) and, second, existing *social practices* whereby (accesses to) things of value are unjustly distributed across different segments of a society (or globe); moreover, the privileged group must be so situated in the *nexus of power* that their thoughts can

perform the chief social function of an ideology, namely to perpetuate those unjust practices.

How do Kant's claims about race fit into this picture, considering that they appear—often in a seemingly random way—in different parts of his writings and lectures? Granted, we can construct a raciology from them. But a theory of race that contains racist elements is not yet a racist *ideology*, as Mills (besides Shelby) understood this term. To appreciate this point, consider two basic theoretical components of Kant's raciology, which I will further explicate in later chapters: first, a rigid racial classificatory system that sorts all humans into distinct races on the basis of supposedly irreversible biological features; second, a theory that links certain racialized characteristics with racially unequal practical outcomes. These theoretical claims *may or may not be used* to initiate, justify, or perpetuate racially discriminatory practices, be they egregious forms of exploitation such as colonialism and chattel slavery or, more generally, race-based exclusions from goods like education, civic participation, candidacy or recognition for intellectual accomplishments, and so on. Whether a racial theory can have any such real-life uptake depends on the concurrent structure of *power* and the theorist's *position* in that structure. After all, if you were in no position to propagate your theory in a way that it would become a constituent of the *social* consciousness of a group of people—in doxastic or nondoxastic forms—or if this group were in no position to hook it up with social and political practices, your words might as well be like a tree falling in a forest with no one around to witness it. The opposite was true of Kant, of course, both as a prolific scholar and as a lifelong educator in an important port city and cultural hub (Königsberg) in the eighteenth-century Europe, a Europe that had already practiced exploitation and colonization around the world for centuries (I will say more about this contextual matter in Chapter 4).

So we need a richer conception of racism than any of the options examined so far, in order to better understand Kant's *relation* to racism. I emphasize "relation" here to signal the need to move beyond individualistic studies that linger on whether, to what extent, or for how long Kant himself was racist. I shall make this move without downplaying the uniquely meaningful roles that Kant might have played, wittingly or not, in shaping a potentially lethal version of racist ideology. What I seek is a nuanced account that makes sense of these roles by *situating* him in a web of power relations, wherein his writings and teachings about race could receive significant uptake among

other relevant actors, generate looping effects with other factors, and thereby contribute to the *formation* of a recognizably modern racist ideology. With this goal, I now turn to Haslanger's critical revision of Shelby's conception of racism as ideology.

## 2.4. Kant and the Racist-Ideological Formation

Shelby's account of racism as ideology comes with a notable caveat: different "social actors" can relate to racism differently, with varying abilities to grasp or articulate the racist worldview that may be "only implicit in [their] behavioral dispositions, utterances, conduct, and practices" (2003: 161). Shelby uses what Appiah called "racialism" to illustrate this point.

> [Racialist beliefs are] probably almost never explicitly held or contemplated by the typical racist. . . . These beliefs are quite frequently confused and may be expressed only in the form of stereotypes, clichés, and fragmented narratives. . . . the function of systematizing these half-baked, diffuse, and crude ideas is typically performed, sometimes unwittingly, by professional "ideologists," for example, politicians, theologians, philosophers, scientists, journalists, teachers, artists, writers, and other would-be intellectuals. (2003: 161)

In contrast to the would-be professional ideologists, a typical individual in a society may have little to no awareness of being "in the grip of a particular picture of the world." A critic of racism should not just target the ideologists' racial theories, then, as convenient as this strategy is for having "relatively clear and stable targets to criticize." Rather, the critic should go after the "messy forms of social consciousness—the 'jungle of ideas'—that these more sophisticated accounts reflect, regulate, and fortify" (2003: 161). This is because, once individual actors have absorbed "the attitudes and habits of mind that are constitutive of racial ideology" through various processes and venues of socialization, such as "media, schools, public rituals, or other revered institutions," we have reasons to fear that racially based unjust treatment will ensue. For one, the "reservoir of background assumptions that agents draw on spontaneously as they engage in social intercourse" now includes perceptions of some so-called races "as superior or normal and others as inferior or defective." For another, the same agents may have the power to

determine how "vital resources" and "access to important opportunities" are distributed (Shelby 2014: 67, 71).

These remarks point to a new way of conceptualizing Kant's relation to racism: besides interrogating his own beliefs about race, we should look into what roles he, *as a social actor*, might have played in shaping the beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and habits of mind of other relevant agents, at a time when modern racial ideology was still nascent and not yet fully formed. Three related issues need to be considered before we delve into this subject. First, for any given social actor, it may not be easy to draw a clear line between being a professional ideologist and being someone who is socialized into the grip of an ideology (even if it is only beginning to take shape). A plausible picture may be that no single actor falls sharply on one side versus the other. As Shelby noted, some intellectuals might contribute to the articulation of an ideology *unwittingly*. These agents may themselves be in the grip of a *movement toward* a would-be ideology without yet grasping the ideological significance or relevance of their work.

This takes us to the second issue, which concerns agential intentions. Shelby's list of ideologists, or the "elites" (2014: 67), covers a whole range of actors—from politicians to philosophers, teachers, artists, and so on. Unless one is referring to an authoritarian regime, it is hard to imagine those actors as contributing to the making of an ideology in a similar enough way to stand under a single title of "professional ideologists," which suggests the attribution of an ideologically oriented intention. While this attribution may be true of the politicians, the situation may be quite different for the philosophers and others. When these actors contribute to the formation and propagation of an ideology, they may very well sincerely take themselves to be doing something else.

The third issue is about the relation between what the elites contribute and what the general public "absorb" (Shelby 2014: 71). The absorption model, interpreted simplistically, suggests that the public are mostly passive recipients of what the elites have contributed. We have reasons to question such a view. For one, the contributions by the would-be ideologists may be expressed in such diverse and disjointed modalities—for example, a philosophical concept, an artistic image, a pedagogically expedient story—that they do not automatically add up to a worldview. For another, agents who are exposed to these varied sources of ideas and images—a reader, a viewer, a student—are themselves *meaning makers* to some extent. They would have to process and synthesize what they read, see, and hear so as to form

a worldview that in turn mediates their social intercourse. How they each carry out this meaning-making process or what worldview they end up with may be influenced by their own lived experiences, the places they occupy in relations of power, their ambitions, material interests, and so forth.

With these considerations, I now turn to Sally Haslanger's critically revised account of racism as ideology.[23] Haslanger begins by critiquing the cognitivist dimension of Shelby's account, which situates racism qua ideology in shared (illusory) beliefs and shared (defective) patterns of thought. What we take up through socialization are not just a set of beliefs (or other psychological states), Haslanger contends, but "a language, a set of concepts [and other framing devices that create meaning], a responsiveness to particular features of things (and not others), a set of social meanings" (2017: 9). Social actors make and transmit meanings within this "semiotic net," in a way that depends on such other material factors as "relations of power" (2017: 14).

In these terms, Haslanger proposes a "practice first" account of ideology. If practices are what "orient us collectively toward, produce, and distribute access to resources" (2017: 12), then ideology is "a public 'network of semiotic relations' that, together with the material conditions, structure our practices and provide the architecture for agency." In other words, an ideology is a *cultural technē*—"a set of cultural tools that shape the practical orientation in a group"—that function to "produce or sustain injustice by guiding us to enact unjust practices." The practical orientation being shaped thereby can include, besides propositional attitudes, all sorts of "psychological mechanisms—cognitive, conative, perceptual, agentic—that sort, shape, and filter what can be the objects of our attitudes." In this way, racism "partly constitutes social practices that give people reason to act in racist ways." Although racism is ideological in this sense, Haslanger adds, we should think of it not simply as an ideology but more broadly as an "ideological formation": it is "constituted by an interconnected web of unjust social *practices* that unjustly disadvantage certain groups," practices that are "connected by a racist technē." The racist technē is both a *product* and a *source* of racist practices, because of

[23] Haslanger's account of racism goes hand in hand with her social constructivist notion of race (2008a). For now, I will set aside the controversy about whether or in what sense "race" is socially constructed. Addressing this controversy would require me to discuss issues that exceed the capacity of this chapter, such as *what* exactly is socially constructed, what it means for something to be *constructed* and moreover *socially* constructed, and whether it follows that race no longer *matters* (for being unreal in a sense). For some discussions (besides Haslanger's own) of these questions, see Mills 1998: 41–66; Hacking 1999; Blum 2002: 147–63; Mallon 2019; Lentin 2020: 16–51; Taylor 2022: 82–117.

"the looping effects that connect agents, meanings, and material conditions" (2017: 15–17).

Haslanger's framework will prove more suitable than Shelby's, which Mills used, for understanding Kant's relation to racism—provided that our eventual goal is to figure out what to do with this understanding.[24] Let me begin with a basic observation. Kant writes and talks about race across different contexts, wearing different hats (for example, a scholar versus a lecturer) and addressing different audiences, likely with different goals of communication. For instance, as I shall explain in Chapters 3 and 4, when he develops "race" as a philosophical concept and argues for his fourfold racial classification in his three essays on race (1775/77, 1785, 1788), he explicitly takes the standpoint of a philosophical "investigator of nature" (*Naturforscher*). In so doing, he builds on, critically engages with, and appeals to the judgment of other qualified investigators. He is transparent about the hypothetical nature of his own theory, mindful of how it compares with the existing alternatives in terms of methodologies and underlying philosophical commitments. In short, he can be pedantic (in a nonpejorative sense of this term)—as a careful scholar should be, at least in writing.

By contrast, when Kant talks about various human races in his lectures, he presents himself as a worldly educator whose mission is to prepare his students for effective participation in society, both at home and abroad; to this end, the students need more pragmatic, relatable, and concretely useful tools and information than speculative theories presented with caveated reasonings. Accordingly, as I reference them throughout this book, Kant's racial remarks in the lectures are mostly unsupported assertions dotted here and there in the vast array of world knowledge (anthropology plus geography) that he wants to impart to his students. It is as if he were saying: "by the way, you need to know this much about this people, because one day you may have to deal with them." As a corollary, he might also say something to this effect: "you need to know this much about your own, white race, in order to know how to perfect yourself according to all the incentives and talents contained in this race" (I explained these points in Chapter 1).

[24] As I pointed out in the preceding note, Haslanger's account of racism as ideological formation is connected with her constructivist notion of race. Kant, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, is clearly not a social constructivist about race; nor does he hold a straightforward version of racial realism, if this means seeing race as a natural kind that is completely independent of our conceptual systems (I thank Reza Mosayebi for this observation). Regardless, we can retrospectively see him as an early contributor to the social *construction* of race through his writings on this topic, the construction being an ongoing historical process that involves countless actors and forces.

What are we to make of this picture? A typical response in Kant scholarship would be to reason in the following fashion. First, Kant's own publications enjoy priority over the lectures that we can now access only through imperfect student notes, for the obvious reason that the former more accurately represent his own considered position. Moreover, greater weight tends to be given to Kant's writings (published or unpublished) and lectures from the so-called critical period, with the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) marking its official start. Accordingly, one may decline to take seriously the racist remarks found in parts of the *Physical Geography*, for instance, upon learning that its editor liberally used Kant's precritical notes and lectures (Stark 2011a, 2011b).

Second, one may compare Kant's three publications on race to see whether his racial views might have evolved over time. In particular, one may highlight and make something of the fact that, while Kant's 1775/77 and 1788 essays on race contain a few remarks that would strike today's readers as obviously racist, such remarks are absent from the 1785 essay, which was published in the same year as the *Groundwork*.[25]

Third, to find out whether or how racism affects Kant's philosophy as a whole, one may proceed to investigate whether, for example, it is feasible to excise those few racist remarks from the 1775/77 and 1788 essays on race without affecting the core, racial but presumably not yet racist theory, which roughly corresponds to what Appiah called "racialism." Next, if Appiah was right to suggest, as I quoted him in section 2.2, that racialism per se is only a *cognitively defective* (false) theory, although it admittedly can be used as the basis for moral wrongs, one may consider refuting Kant's basic racial theory for building on invalid arguments and/or "false factual assumptions" (Hill and Boxill 2001: 452). In the end, one may settle on granting that Kant's racial views—be they racist or not—are mostly "empirical a posteriori claims that could be falsified by experience" (2001: 455). So, even if he is culpable for his "ignorance of empirical fact" (he "should have known better" because he was presented with contrary descriptions of certain nonwhites by credible expert witnesses),[26] the problem does not penetrate any deeper into his philosophy—especially "not to the core of his ethical and political theories" (2001: 459–60).

[25] For examples of this approach, see Eberl 2019; Muthu 2003: 181–84.

[26] This remark about witness reports betrays a basic misunderstanding of how Kant used travel reports, a form of testimony by his standard, in theorizing about race (Lu-Adler 2022a).

These approaches may be fine for scholarly research about how different parts of Kant's philosophical corpus—presented to us as a static print collection of books, essays, reviews, correspondences, personal notes, and lectures—relate to one another. But they overlook the fact that Kant, by writing and lecturing repeatedly about race, made himself a crucial part of the "semiotic net," to borrow Haslanger's term, underpinning the incipient formation of modern racist ideology. From this perspective, whether his theory of race was built on invalid arguments and/or faulty empirical assumptions is beside the point (moreover, as I shall explain in Chapters 3 and 4, it is far from obvious that his natural-scientific account of race is as cognitively defective as it is alleged to be). No matter how caveated Kant, as a scholar, intended his published theory of race to be, its scholarly nuances might be largely lost to most of his readers who were not experts (as I mentioned in Chapter 1, Kant's race essays were reprinted multiple times during his lifetime and the same denigrating remarks about the Amerindians and "Negroes" were reproduced verbatim). To borrow a few lines from Staffan Müller-Wille, the concept of race Kant developed in his race essays can, independently of his authorial intention, function as a discursive "tool" or "framing device" that allows meaning-making agents to organize their perceptions and social practices. After all, it is plausible that a concept, once generated, can "lead a life of [its] own, below the radar . . . of explicit [rational] discourse" and may be "employed for purposes and reasons that were alien to those who introduced them initially" (2014: 601–2, to be further discussed in Chapter 5).[27]

Besides a relatively thin concept of race for classifying humans by skin color, more fleshed-out profiles of the four putative races emerge from Kant's lectures and other published remarks about their characteristics. In these cases, Kant often presents his audiences with vivid depictions of peoples on faraway places. These may appear as assertions of empirical facts in juxtaposition with substantive philosophical statements. For instance, when arguing that "unsociability" is necessary for the establishment of the "civil state, . . . the only condition in which all the natural predispositions of the human being can be developed," Kant tells his students:

[27] Müller-Wille is referring to Carl Linnaeus, Georges Buffon, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach as the representative initiators of race concepts, with no mention of Kant (in Chapter 4, I will explain the originality of Kant's theory of race in comparison with Buffon's for instance). The same point can be extended to Kant nonetheless.

> Without this unsociability there would never have arisen a firm civil association, but at most only the arcadian life of a shepherd, i.e., a life full of laziness with the best attitudes, whereby the human being would never be perfected or cultivated and would not be more esteemed than any other animal species. One still finds such a life in Tahiti, where laziness dominates all the inhabitants. (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1422–23; see IaG, 8: 21; RezHerder, 8: 65; on Kant's racialization of laziness, see Lu-Adler 2022b)

In the *Groundwork*, while talking about the duty to cultivate one's talent, Kant mentions the "South Sea Islanders" as examples of the human being who would "let his talents rust and be concerned with devoting his life merely to idleness, amusement, procreation—in a word, to enjoyment" (GMS, 4: 423; see MAM, 8: 122–23; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1422). On yet another occasion, Kant singles out "the Hottentot"—derogatory reference to a South-African population of hunter-gatherers—to illustrate how much humans, *sans* reason, resemble animals (V-Anth/Collins, 25: 13–14; see V-Anth/Parow, 25: 246). Elsewhere, Kant conveys the impression that uncivilized tropical peoples or "savages" are closer to animals by highlighting the exceptional acuity of their bodily faculties—such as the ability to "run astonishingly quickly" and to "perceive a ship with the naked eye at the same distance that a European can with a telescope" (PG, 9: 316; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 93–4). I will give more examples and discuss their implications in Chapter 5 (I also mentioned some in Chapter 1). For now, I want to use these few examples to demonstrate Kant's place in the semiotic network that underpinned the formation of a still nascent modern racist ideology.

Earlier, I quoted Eze as dismissing the idea that Kant was a provincialist who recycled "ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, fueled . . . by the travel narratives of eighteenth-century Europeans who had economic and imperial political and cultural ambitions in other lands." I agree that one should not see Kant *merely* as a provincialist in the way described. At the same time, however, we should not underestimate the fact that he did recycle many of the "ethnic stereotypes and prejudices" from the travel narratives and incorporate them into his writings and teachings. Having spent nearly his entire life in Königsberg,[28] Kant had to draw on travel literature for his depictions of the Tahitians, "Hottentots," and so on. In the process, he no doubt borrowed a great deal of what would strike us today as prejudicial accounts but what

[28] Early in his career, Kant was away from Königsberg for almost six years (Stark 2011a: 70–71).

would *appear to him as factual descriptions* of those peoples from the available travelogues.[29] This practice is not in itself problematic. His own theory of testimony, developed in his logic lectures, in fact makes it reasonable for him to seek out and trust certain travelogues as truthful depictions of the places and peoples he could not directly experience (Lu-Adler 2022a).

If Kant may be called a "provincialist" by virtue of recycling stereotypes and prejudices about other peoples from select travel narratives, he was not just any provincialist. His *position* as an eminent philosopher and a popular lecturer—especially for his anthropology and geography courses—gives us every reason to expect him to be an exceptionally impactful social actor in the meaning-making network.[30] The recycled tales and imageries of other peoples, once taken up and permanently lodged in both his own publications and the circulated student notes of his anthropology and geography lectures, would now seem not only more credible but also newly *meaningful*. As we can see from the abovementioned examples (and numerous others noted elsewhere in this book), Kant often delivers borrowed claims about other peoples within particular conceptual schemas—for example, unsociability, self-cultivation, humanity versus mere animality, civilization versus savagery—that endow them with normative significance. Whether this was his intention is indeterminable but also irrelevant here. As far as I can tell, he made no concerted effort to systematize those claims, which are often fragmented and scattered in separate lectures and writings, into an explicit racist ideology to explain, rationalize, or justify the European practices of exploitation (chattel slavery and colonization). He nonetheless provided ample *framing devices* that could be taken up by other meaning makers and social actors in his extended sphere of influence, who could in turn add to the racist-ideological formation through their own discursive and nondiscursive practices.

One cannot establish any straightforward causal connections here, of course, since there is no single, isolatable causal factor in any ideological formation (if Haslanger was right). One can imagine, though, how the

[29] Kant gives a list of his sources in his first announcement about his geography course (1757). He claims: "I have gone through the most thorough descriptions of individual countries by capable travellers" in order to construct a knowledge system "out of everything relevant to my purpose" (EACG, 2: 4).

[30] From 1776 through the end of his career, Kant also served intermittently as the dean of philosophy faculty (six times, with someone else standing in for his seventh and eighth turns to be the dean), the rector (twice), and a permanent member of the academic senate at the University of Königsberg. See Kuehn 2001: xvii–xxi, 206, 314–16, 330, 474n66.

Europeans who got the race concepts and their world knowledge directly or indirectly from Kant's writings and lectures could piece things together and make sense of the European racial hegemony in the eighteenth century and beyond.

## 2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to bring some conceptual clarity to the discourse on Kant's relation to racism. Before I summarize my main findings and their implications, let me turn to a footnote in Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill's "Kant and Race," where the authors differentiate four sets of questions raised by the race-related "objections" to Kant and/or his philosophy.

> (1) Is Kant's allegedly racist idea an empirical claim, a specific attitude, or a philosophical thesis? (2) Is it an idea that is itself racist (in some specified sense) or merely one that tends (e.g. in the wrong hands) to facilitate the growth of racist ideas and attitudes? (3) Are the specific objections and charges directed to ideas or the man, e.g. the man's motivation by racist attitudes, the man's having been culpably influenced by racist ideas, or the man's culpably endorsing racist ideas? (4) In so far as the objections are to Kant's philosophy, broadly construed, are they objections to his basic ideas (e.g. the central and more foundational claims in the three Critiques and the *Groundwork*) or to aspects of Kant's philosophy that are separable parts (independent or falsely believed to be derivative) or to merely particular illustrations presented re philosophical points (perhaps falsely believed to be apt examples)? For example, in the latter two categories: Kant's claims about property, revolution, women, and, arguably, race. (Hill and Boxill 2001: 448n1)[31]

If I may respond to these questions, I shall begin by saying that my primary intention is not to raise "objections"—let alone morally charged ones (as suggested by the language of culpability)—either to Kant the man or to his philosophy. Rather, I take the standpoint of a philosophical historian who seeks, first and foremost, a better *understanding* of Kant's relation to racism.[32]

[31] The authors' main target is Eze 1995 (Hill and Boxill 2001: 452–59).

[32] At the end of the introduction to this book, I also explained why this emphasis on understanding is important to me personally, as someone who belongs in one of the so-called races that Kant

To this end, I have argued that we need to interrogate how we conceptualize "racism" when we use this notion to talk about Kant and/or his philosophy. There is a general tendency among Kant scholars to take a purely individualistic approach, whereby they ask whether, to what extent, by what psychological mechanism, and for how long he was racist—on account of holding some form of racial-hierarchical beliefs and/or exhibiting contempt and other disrespectful attitudes toward nonwhites (sections 2.2 and 2.3.1). To find a path beyond this individualistic discourse, I reviewed the debates among some race theorists about how best to define 'racism.' Some locate racism in an individual's beliefs (cognitive conception), while others locate it in an individual's attitudes, volitions, or motivations (attitudinal conception). The arguments behind this debate over the location of racism often reflect the need to capture what is distinctly immoral about racism. The assumption that racism is necessarily immoral also drives the narrow-scope conception of racism that focuses on the most egregious cases. Tommie Shelby rejects this moralistic assumption, without which there is no longer any need to worry about what is in a particular individual's head or heart. Instead, Shelby's account of racism as ideology focuses on *social* agents, practices, and power structures and therefore on the *social* functions of race concepts and racist beliefs. This marks the first important departure from the individualistic discourse (section 2.3.2).

But Shelby's account of racism as ideology is still inadequate as a framework for understanding Kant's relation to racism. To keep searching, I then turned to Sally Haslanger's account (2017), which took shape through a critical engagement with Shelby's. Haslanger's notion of racism as racist-ideological *formation* emphasizes the roles that different social actors can play in making and transmitting meanings within a dynamic "semiotic net." What, if any, impact each social actor can have depends on all sorts of material conditions, including the actor's own location within the existing nexus of power relations. In these terms, I suggested that we should investigate the dynamic roles that Kant, both as a prominent philosopher and as a lifelong educator, could make in the nascent formation of modern racist ideology (section 2.4).

repeatedly denigrated. All in all, my quest for an adequate notion of racism is driven by pragmatic concerns. As it will become clear in Chapters 5 and 6 and in the conclusion to this book, my ultimate pragmatic concern is about racialized groups that are historically oppressed, excluded, made invisible, and so on. See Urquidez 2020, which makes a compelling case for this kind of approach.

To be clear, I am not asking that we determine Kant's actual *causal* impact in the racist-ideological formation. Nor would it be a good use of one's time to try to bridge what Hannah Arendt, writing in 1944, described as the "abyss between the men of brilliant and facile conceptions and the men of brutal deeds and active bestiality," because no amount of "intellectual explanation" can bridge the racial theorizing done by intellectuals like Kant, for instance, and the most egregious practices of racism, such as the enslavement of blacks and the genocide of Jews (1944: 72–73).[33] The initial formation (as well as subsequent mutations) of modern racist ideology, which serves to justify racist deeds and social arrangements, is irreducible to a linear causal chain or to isolatable historical incidents or actors. As Haslanger suggested, racist-ideological formation is *inextricably entangled* with practices, so that one cannot say, for instance, that a racialist/racist way of thinking was established and then racist practices followed. That way of thinking—not simply as something in a particular individual's mind but as a kind of social consciousness—must have taken shape organically within an *interconnected* web of meaning-making agents, existent social structures and practices, historical conditions, and so on, all of which can generate looping effects in reference to one another.

That being said, if racism in its most important sense is about "being in the position to negatively affect other people's life chances" (Eddo-Lodge 2018: 2), in certain cases some people—such as Kant—may be much better positioned than others to exert such power (this point will be best illustrated in Chapter 6). In these terms, I suggest that we update the questions we ask about Kant's relation to racism. I take the following to be a commonsense truism: we can never ascertain a dead man's (or anyone's) true motives; as for what he said or wrote about race, no matter how obviously they strike us as racist today, those statements would have little to no practical significance unless, at the minimum, he was so *powerfully positioned* in a nexus of social and historical relations that the statements could receive a significant *uptake* in a world of meaning makers and social actors. Accordingly, we may replace Hill and Boxill's questions (1)–(3) with this one: (in what ways) was Kant so well positioned that we could at least expect his statements about race to have a noteworthy impact on the racist-ideological formation at the time?

[33] Arendt's account of the history of "race" focused on the nineteenth century. She did not see Kant as one of those early intellectual contributors to race thinking.

If I was right to highlight the fact that Kant, as an educator, had access to generations of young white men with his popular anthropology and geography courses (section 2.4), the racial views he impressed on those still formative minds need not await what Hills and Boxill called "wrong hands" to negatively affect the racial others' life chances. And it is moot, in the scheme of things, whether Kant personally intended those views to have any racist outcome—in the sense of systematically excluding some races from certain recognized goods—or whether he would condone any such outcome once it was realized. What matters most is that he injected them into a social structure in which they were prone to generating racist outcomes one way or another. To quote Arendt again, while racism—understood in terms of hegemonic social and political arrangements—might have been invented regardless of whether race thinking existed in the "civilized world," race thinking, now that it existed, "proved to be a powerful help for racism" (1944: 73).

In Kant's case, year after year he equipped his students with a racialized worldview,[34] in reference to which they could organize their perceptions and social-political relations in a world that was, as a matter of fact, increasingly dominated by the so-called Occidental whites. As I suggested in Chapter 1, Kant's anthropology and geography teachings would together give his Occidental white audiences an unmistakable impression that they *alone*, as members of the naturally privileged race, could and should act as agents propelling humanity toward its cultural and moral destinies. With this assumption, how else would they feel other than believing that they were entitled, for instance, to colonize and "civilize" other parts of the world? Whether Kant himself would endorse this prospect is beside the point.

A related issue concerns how to assess various parts of Kant's philosophical system in light of his raciology (both the racialist and the racist aspects thereof). Hill and Boxill's question (4) assumes that there is a clean, non-question-begging separation to be made between Kant's core philosophical claims (in the three *Critique*'s and the *Groundwork*) and the racist claims that presumably belong to the merely tangential and hence excisable parts of his system. Under this assumption, it seems reasonable to ask whether "Kant's central philosophical principles are tainted with racism" and to answer "no" if the latter is not strictly entailed by the former (Hill and Boxill 2001: 452).

[34] This point is particularly significant given that Kant likely invented the very concept "worldview" (Englert 2022) and had a great deal to say regarding the processes by which one forms a worldview, be it about nature or about the human world (Makkreel 2022).

Hill and Boxill's starting assumption is mistaken, however. As a pragmatically oriented philosopher, Kant would not have wanted the pure rational parts of his system to be read in isolation from his understanding of how they may be realized in the empirical world. I illustrated this point in Chapter 1, where I explicated the multilayered relations among his pure moral philosophy (as represented by the *Groundwork*), pragmatic anthropology, and physical geography. It is certainly important to Kant that pure moral claims, to be strictly universal, must be established a priori and therefore only with respect to human beings qua rational beings *in abstracto*. But it is just as, if not more, important to him that those are not empty claims of a pedantic moralist, but rather signify the moral destiny of humanity—a destiny that it can realize only as a species over indefinitely many generations. We would not have a complete picture of Kant's philosophical system unless we take into account his anthropologic and geographic thoughts about the inner and outer conditions for the eventual moralization of humanity. His raciology, whether we like it or not, is part and parcel of this system.

We should flip Hill and Boxill's question (4), then. The important question to ask is not whether the supposed core of Kant's philosophy is affected by the parts that are racialist or racist. Rather, we should investigate whether the concepts, principles, and methodologies he has developed in such works as the *Critique of Pure Reason* may somehow complement or even underwrite his raciology. This is where Kant's reputation as an ingenious and rigorous scholar matters most. We shall see in Chapters 3 and 4 that, as he became interested in the phenomenon of human variations, he would also bring the most innovative aspects of his theoretical philosophy to bear on the subject and thereby introduce a truly groundbreaking concept of race. This theoretical development went hand in hand with the crystallization of Kant's teleological view of human history, which in turn *lends philosophical significance* to his factual claims about the various races with respect to their talents, dispositions, and temperaments. In the context of an incipient and dynamic racist-ideological formation, whether Kant himself meant to connect the dots and explicitly spell out the racist implications is not as important as whether the dots could easily get connected in the minds of his students and readers at the time. As I already suggested in Chapter 1 and will further demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6, it would not be hard for those meaning-making and world-making agents to draw—and enact—the connections.

# PART II
# SEEING "RACE"

# 3

# Investigating Nature under the Guidance of Reason

## Kant's Approach to "Race" as a *Naturforscher*

### 3.1. Introduction

Debates about Kant's racial views over the last couple of decades often focus on how they relate to his moral and political views.[1] They also tend to assume the kind of distinction that Pauline Kleingeld draws in "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," namely between a "*bona fide* physiological concept" of "race as a biological category" and racism qua "racial hierarchism" (2007: 574–75). This distinction gives Kleingeld room to show how Kant could belatedly abandon racism in the context of his political philosophy—to be "more egalitarian with regard to race"—without giving up the biological concept of race (2007: 592). The same distinction may also allow one to isolate Kant's ostensibly racist remarks and treat them as what Robert Louden calls Kant's "private prejudices" (2000: 105), while seeing his biological theory of race as a straightforward intellectual exercise that can be assessed by purely theoretical standards (for example, whether the theory is empirically grounded).

If one thereby implies that Kant's theoretical account of race as a biological category has no practical relevance, one should think again. As I suggested in Chapter 2 and will further elaborate in Chapter 4, it was through theorizing about race as a biological category that Kant developed a potent conceptual framework to solidify and *give philosophical meaning* to what might have otherwise remained as mere folk prejudices. This is partly because he started

[1] As Jimmy Yab has incisively observed (2021: 20–22), Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's 1995 essay on Kant's idea of race shaped the leading question for subsequent commentators, namely whether Kant's racist comments affect his *practical* philosophy. For studies that focus primarily if not exclusively on the relation between Kant's raciology and his *theoretical* philosophy, see Lagier 2004; Gray 2015; Mensch 2017; Sandford 2018; Gorkom 2020a; Hahmann 2022; Lu-Adler 2022a; Mateo and Stubenrauch 2022.

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theorizing about race at a time when there had already been a long intellectual tradition of studying *naturalized* human differences (among other forms of biological diversity). This intellectual tradition, as we shall see in Chapter 4, came with its own moral baggage. For one, it was materially entangled with Europe's colonializing activities, plantation slavery, and the transatlantic slave trade associated with the latter. For another, its paradigm-shifting decision to study humans *as animals* created the conceptual space for entertaining the idea—as Kant would—that not all humans could play an agential part in the arduous historical journey from the animal-like state (savagery) all the way to the species-bound moral destiny. Against this backdrop, any theoretical attempt to classify humans and explain their classificatory differences had the potential of being used to justify racist practices, regardless of the theorist's own intention. In Kant's case, his increasingly sophisticated biological theory of race would also give him the language to talk about the place of each race in the history of humanity on account of their racialized characteristics. Once race and human history were connected in this way, the connection could be taken up by other social actors and, through their situated meaning-making and world-making practices, woven into the incipient modern racist ideology (as I explained in Chapter 2).

Kant took part in this historical process primarily as a philosopher with a lifelong interest in natural science. It was no accident that he published three essays on race (1775/77, 1785, and 1788),[2] in which he took the standpoint of a *Naturforscher* or investigator of nature. In this chapter, I seek to uncover the philosophical commitments that define such a standpoint. I begin with an overview of how the *Naturforscher*'s perspective manifests itself in all three of Kant's race essays (section 3.2). I then foreground the basic commitments associated with this perspective, by tracing them to some of Kant's early writings on topics in natural science. These writings also contain clues as to why he would become so invested in theorizing about race as a biological category: he was already intrigued by the conception of human beings as *products of nature*; given his Newtonianism,[3] according to which all natural phenomena must be explained by natural causes in accordance with known (knowable) laws of nature, he was confronted with the challenge of explaining how *organic* beings—from plants to animals (including

[2] For a helpful overview of all three essays, see Mikkelsen 2013: 18–28.

[3] Kant's relationship to Newtonianism was complex. His Newtonian commitments were always mixed with anti-Newtonian elements, especially regarding the issue of God (Watkins 2013). We will see him wrestling with this issue as he became interested in the question of organic formation.

humans)—could (re)generate their kinds in a natural law-governed manner (section 3.3).

In a way, the vast amount of available data about human differences and the ongoing background debates about the purported differences, which I shall detail in Chapter 4, provided Kant with the perfect material to try out his take on the explanatory challenge just mentioned. In the process, he would develop and refine his unique view of the roles that reason must play in the investigation of nature. This view is reflected both in how he treats hypotheses, which are indispensable to the work of a *Naturforscher* (section 3.4), and in how he makes room for the use of teleological principles in the investigations of organic formation in general and of hereditary human differences in particular (sections 3.6 and 3.7). Studying these topics will take us on a journey through nearly all the major theoretical works that Kant produced during his career, culminating in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790, "third *Critique*" henceforth). We will thereby recognize the extent to which his theorizing of race from the standpoint of a *Naturforscher* was intertwined with and likely even spurred some of his most sophisticated philosophical innovations.

At the same time, those philosophical breakthroughs may have given the resulting theory of race an illusion of rigor and soundness (from Kant's perspective), an illusion that cannot be easily corrected by empirical data (this will become even more apparent in Chapter 4). Even if we set aside all the remarks Kant ever made that strike us as racist, we should still be alarmed by his single-minded focus on the phenomenon of human differences as a *theoretical* challenge, without showing any concern about the very real possibility that theoretical studies of human subjects—at a time when actual humans were being traded and exploited as slaves—could carry high *practical stakes* (section 3.8).

## 3.2. Investigating "race" from the Standpoint of a *Naturforscher*: A Sketch of Kant's View

A philosopher, Kant writes, is "one who spends his life intent on searching into things" and finding out truths about them (MCP, 15: 948). He thereby captures the spirit of inquiry that he followed from the very start of his career. His philosophical debut, "Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces" (1746–49), has as its epigraph a quote from Seneca's *De vita beata*: "Nothing is

more imperative than that we should not, like cattle, follow the herd of those who have gone before us, traveling not where one ought to go, but where they have gone" (GSK, 1: 7). Accordingly, Kant spends the entire preface to his debut treatise to make the case for involving himself, then still "a lowly and unknown writer" (1: 10), in the controversy about the so-called *vis viva* controversy.[4] He begins with a declaration of intellectual independence:

> human understanding has already happily freed itself from the shackles that ignorance and admiration had formerly placed on it. Henceforth, one can boldly dare to think nothing of the reputation of a *Newton* and a *Leibniz*, if it should oppose the discovery of truth, and to obey no persuasions other than the force of the understanding. (1: 7)

In short, one should "place a certain noble trust in one's own powers." For this self-confidence "enlivens all our efforts and confers on them a certain momentum that is very advantageous to the investigation of truth." Even if one ends up with numerous errors in such investigations, "the profit which thereby accrues to the cognition of truth will nonetheless be far more considerable than if one had always remained on well-trodden paths" (1: 10).

As Kant later puts it, while one would err little if one were "to distinguish nothing, to judge little," such a "home-made remedy" against errors is mere "thoughtlessness." "He who never judges will also never err," to be sure, "but he will never speak a truth, either." When should one brave the risk of error and venture to judge, then? It depends on what is *at stake*, Kant suggests. In this regard, there is a significant difference between merely speculative (theoretical) and practical cognitions. In the former case, one should "dare to err." It is wise to be weary and judge little when it comes to practical matters, however, especially if one had "extremely important ends, so that every error, even the smallest, would be dangerous" (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 83–84).[5]

[4] Kant's approach to this controversy already pointed to the larger issue in which he would invest a lot of energy, namely the relation between metaphysics and physics (Lu-Adler 2018c). The same issue would also become prominent in his theory of race.

[5] It is not immediately clear what Kant means by 'speculative cognitions' in this context. In one sense, they are simply theoretical cognitions, "through which I cognize *what exists*," whereas practical cognitions are those "through which I represent *what ought to exist*." In another sense, speculative cognitions are only a subset of theoretical cognitions, the objects of which we cannot encounter in experience. As such, they are directly opposed to cognitions of nature, which pertain only to objects of possible experience (A633–35/B661–63; see KU, 5: 416; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 900–901). I suspect that, in the remarks about the stake of an error, Kant is referring to the theoretical-practical distinction.

A question suggests itself here: in which domain of philosophical inquiry—theoretical or practical—does "race" belong? To Kant, it is the former: "race" is primarily a subject of natural philosophy. This designation is most salient in his last essay on the topic (1788), where he invokes "a philosophical *jury* . . . composed of mere investigators of nature [*Naturforschern*]" to adjudicate his dispute with Georg Forster (1754–94). Forster, an experienced and respected field naturalist,[6] criticized Kant's theory of race in an article entitled "Noch etwas über die Menschenrassen" (1786).[7] Kant's call for the jury of *Naturforschern* is a reaction to Forster's appeal to a "genuine philosophical jury" (2013: 167). Forster was not referring to the *Naturforschern*, though. Rather, he made the appeal while expressing doubts as to whether Kant's monogenism, the theory that different races are developed from the same human phylum, is any better than polygenism in protecting "Negroes" against "European cruelty," as symbolized by "the raised whip of the slave driver." To Forster, the answer was manifestly "no": monogenism "has not prevented a single act of ignominy throughout all the time in which it has been accepted" by white Europeans against "ill-treated" blacks (2013: 165–66). Against this backdrop, Kant's appeal to a jury of *Naturforschern*, while entirely sidestepping the question of slavery, is revealing. He thereby signals that he is interested in race as a theoretical subject first and foremost. He will follow his own advice that, in theoretical inquiries, one should dare to judge about the subject, albeit fallibly, and do so with the best resources at one's disposal.

In the remainder of this section, I will briefly explain how Kant theorizes about race in a way that reflects some of his broader philosophical commitments, before delving into these commitments in subsequent sections.

Above all, Kant urges the *Naturforscher* to reflect on the higher-order principles that guide his investigation, particularly when he has to address competitors and opponents. Such a reflection is at the center of his 1785

[6] Forster, together with his father Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–98), took part in James Cook's second voyage to the South Seas (1772–75). The elder Forster, the lead naturalist in that voyage, was also knowledgeable about the first voyage (Paisey 2011). Among other things, the Forsters' observations about the South Sea Islanders would have a transformative impact on the evolving scientific accounts of human varieties, especially the ones by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840). On the two Forsters' racial views, see McInerney 2013. For the most recent intellectual biographies of Georg Forster, see Goldstein 2019 and Kontje 2022.

[7] Reprinted as Forster 1991. Unless otherwise noted, I will be citing the English translation (Forster 2013). On the Kant-Forster controversy, see Strack 1996; Gray 2015; Sandford 2018: 966–70; Goldstein 2019: 92–104.

essay on race. Here, one is confronted with the challenge of having to sort through various hypotheses regarding "what brings it about that something which does not belong to the essence of the species can be hereditary." The "freedom to form hypotheses," Kant laments, has become "so unrestricted that it is a great pity for all the effort and labor spent on refutations in this matter, since every one follows his own head in such cases." In response, Kant recommends two measures. First, one must reflect on the particular *maxims of reason* that underwrite all the competing hypotheses. The goal is to identify the maxim that is "proved, exactly in keeping with the use of reason in natural science and the only one fit for a consistent mode of thought [*consequenten Denkungsart*]."[8] Having found this maxim, one can then "follow it without heeding those alleged facts" that someone else may have selected to support a competing hypothesis. Second, one must be willing to subject one's hypothesis to principled *experiments*, as opposed to "contingent perceptions" snatched up here and there. Only then can the human reason be protected against "delusion and fiction" in its quest for explanations (BBM, 8: 96–97).

Kant deems three approaches unacceptable *in principle* when it comes to explaining hereditary differences. He mentions the first approach in his 1775/77 essay on race.[9] He attributes it to Voltaire, who reportedly invoked God's special, purposeful creations to account for the seemingly incompatible differences among humans.

> To say with *Voltaire* that God, who created the reindeer in Lapland to consume the moss of these cold parts, also created the Lapplander there to eat this reindeer is not a bad idea for a poet but a poor resort for the philosopher who may not leave the chain of natural causes except where he sees it manifestly attached to immediate ordinance. (VRM, 2: 440)[10]

[8] The consistent (*Konsequent*) mode of thinking is the last of what Kant calls three "unalterable commands" for "the class of thinkers." The other two are thinking for oneself and thinking from a universal standpoint (Anth, 7: 228; see KU, 5: 294–95; Log, 9: 57).

[9] On significant differences between the 1775 and 1777 editions of Kant's first essay on race, see Mikkelsen 2013: 55–59. The Cambridge translation I am using is of the 1777 edition, plus the first and last paragraphs of the 1775 edition wherein Kant announced his lecture course on physical geography.

[10] Voltaire was a provocative advocate of polygenism. For an analysis of Voltaire's position that situates it against the backdrop of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French debate about human varieties and quest for a scientific racial theory, see Harvey 2012: 125–53.

The appeal to the philosopher's standpoint is the key here. From this standpoint, as Kant puts it in his 1788 essay on race, "in natural science everything must be explained *naturally*" (GTP, 8: 178).

The second, what Kant calls the "common, shallow mode of representation," does not attempt at any explanation at all, natural or supernatural. Rather, it "places all differences in our species on the same footing, namely that of chance, and as such differences still now come about and vanish, just as external circumstances make it happen, declares all investigations of this kind superfluous" (GTP, 8: 168). Chance, of course, really explains nothing and so cannot satisfy the interest of the philosophical investigator of nature.[11]

The third mode of explanation that Kant finds clearly inadmissible traces hereditary differences to artificial human intervention. For instance, it posits "the plucking of the beard in entire peoples, as well as the cropping of the tails on English horse." It explains the heredity of "flattened noses" in a people by speculating that this feature was "at first artificially given by parents to newborn children and then supposedly taken up by nature into her generative power." Giving credence to this kind of hypothesis, Kant warns, threatens to breach the bounds of reason beyond repair, as "delusion forces itself through this breach in thousands." That is, it indulges the imagination but delivers no proper *understanding* of the phenomenon of heredity, which demands a causal explanation in accordance with constant laws of nature (BBM, 8: 96–97).

This point still leaves what Kant calls the "physical-mechanical mode of explanation" (GTP, 8: 179). Following this approach, one would explain hereditary differences *solely* by appealing to "the universal mechanical laws" (VRM, 2: 435) or to "the mere mechanical influences of external causes," such as climate (RezHerder, 8: 62). Kant rejects this mode of explanation as well, not because it has violated certain rational norms of investigation, but because it is inadequate as an explanation. What is to be explained is not just any natural phenomenon, but the phenomenon of heredity in *organic* beings (plants and animals, including humans). A purely mechanical explanation would indeed receive its recommendation from the "otherwise wholly correct" maxim of parsimony, according to which one should not unnecessarily multiply explanatory principles (BBM, 8: 96). No "physical-mechanical

[11] The concept of a "philosophical investigator of nature," as someone who may not accept anything other than what has been established with certainty, is also key to Christoph Girtanner's reconstruction of Kant's theory of race (Girtanner 1796, near the end of the unpaged *Vorrede*).

causes can produce an organic body," however, let alone "add something to its generative power, i.e., bring about something that propagates itself" (VRM, 2: 435).

Although the maxim of parsimony rules against assuming "special first powers of nature or created predispositions" to explain phenomena, Kant overrides it with the maxim that nature always preserves itself. According to this maxim, "throughout all of organic nature in all changes of individual creatures their species is preserved unchanged" (BBM, 8: 96–97). More specifically, for each organic species, nature equips it "through hidden inner provisions for all kinds of future circumstances, so that it may preserve itself and be suited to the difference of the climate or the soil." The inner provisions consist in certain "germs [*Keime*]" and "natural predispositions [*Anlagen*]" that are contained in the original phylum (*Stamm*) of the species; different climates are part of the material conditions under which those germs and predispositions would so develop as to render the species fit for the particular environment in which it must survive and preserve itself; if a population remained in a given climate for a long period of time, the specific character developed through the adaptive process could become hereditary and persist across different climates (VRM, 2: 434).

This explanatory model covers all species of organisms, including plants (such as wheat) and nonhuman animals (such as birds) as well as humans. The "occasional unfoldings" in each of these species must be considered as "preformed [*vorgebildet*]," Kant argues, not originally produced by physical-mechanical causes such as air and sun (primary markers of a climate). The latter causes cannot endow a change in the organisms "with a generative power that would be capable of reproducing itself" even in altered climates. Rather, what is capable of self-propagating "must have laid previously in the generative power as antecedently determined to an occasional unfolding" under the particular circumstances where a species had to survive and preserve itself over time (2: 434–35).

Such is the theoretical framework in which Kant explains the heredity of skin color, the characteristic by which he divides humans into four principal races.[12] He views these races as subspecies (*Abartungen*) of the same human species (*Gattung*), sharing the same phyletic origin (*Abstammung*). Their formation involves two kinds of causes. First, there is the *purposive*

[12] See McLaughlin 2007 for a further investigation of the centrality of heredity to Kant's theory of race.

*cause*, which consists in the various germs and natural predispositions in the original human phylum, lying ready to be developed. Second, there must be certain *natural causes* that provide the occasion for such developments. Kant includes *air* and *sun* as "those causes which most deeply influence the generative power and produce an enduring development of the germs and predispositions, i.e., are able to establish a race" (VRM, 2: 435–36; see Girtanner 1796: 12). How the original germs and predispositions would develop during the first period of human existence depends on the particular climate in which the most ancient inhabitants had to adapt and preserve themselves. On Kant's account, there are exactly four climates that are radically different in terms of air and sun: humid cold, dry cold, humid heat, and dry heat. Four distinct skin colors developed as a result of prolonged adaptation to those climates—white, copper-red, black, and yellow. These developments became irreversible and unfailingly hereditary, which is why each skin color marks a race (VRM, 2: 441; BBM, 8: 93–94). In sum,

> the germs which were originally placed in the phylum of the human species for the generation of the races must have developed already in most ancient times according to the needs of the climate, if the residence there lasted a long time; and after one of these predispositions was developed in a people, it extinguished all the others entirely. (BBM, 8: 105)

What else could explain the unfailing heredity of skin colors, Kant asks rhetorically, than "that they must have lain in the germs of the to-us-unknown original phylum of the human species, and that as such natural predispositions which were necessary for the preservation of the species at least in the first period of its propagation and for that reason had to occur unfailingly in the successive generations" (BBM, 8: 98; see GTP, 8: 173–77)?

This is only a sketch of Kant's scientific account of race. Before we dig further into the account and uncover its groundbreaking historical significance in Chapter 4, it will prove instructive to step back and reflect on some larger philosophical issues. This will also give us a window into why Kant became so preoccupied with the issue of race that he felt compelled to write not one, but three dedicated essays about it and why all three essays assumed the standpoint of a *Naturforscher*. We will begin by considering what he takes to be the basic commitments of a *Naturforscher* (section 3.3). We will then turn to the theory of hypothesis that is operative in the work of this Kantian *Naturforscher*, to highlight the guiding role that Kant assigns to reason in

the study of nature (section 3.4). This role becomes even more salient when we consider how Kant, in the third *Critique* (1790) as well as the third essay on race (1788), carves out space for the use of teleological principles in the investigation of organisms in general and of hereditary human differences in particular (sections 3.6 and 3.7). Kant does this partly to address certain challenges to the initial presentation of his theory in the first race essay and to clarify the supposition of the purposive cause mentioned above (section 3.5).

## 3.3. Commitments of a *Naturforscher*: Some Telling Clues in Kant's Early Works

The majority of Kant's writings before the publication of his 1775 essay on race more or less directly pertain to the investigation of nature. Some of his early reflections on natural philosophy also parallel and occasionally intersect with his incipient raciology. Such reflections will be my focus in this section.

The first thing to note is that Kant, in his early discourses about nature, often self-consciously assumes the viewpoint of a *Naturforscher*. This term is variously translated as 'investigator of nature,' 'naturalist,' 'natural philosopher,' and 'natural scientist.'[13] I will occasionally use 'philosophical naturalist,' although I think 'investigator of nature' is the most apt translation.[14] The Kantian naturalist is obliged to investigate the causes of natural phenomena that are *important to humanity*. Kant exemplified this commitment when he published three essays on earthquake in a single year (1756), after

[13] For a systematic study of what can be ascribed to Kant as a *Naturforscher*, see Adickes 1924–25. It is not always clear what Kant means by this term, though. As we shall see in section 3.6.2, he sometimes finds it necessary to distinguish between *physical* and *metaphysical* investigations of nature.

[14] 'Naturalist' has been used to translate other terms as well, and it can have quite different meanings in different contexts. It can be a *Naturkundige*, who in Kant's view exemplifies a mere artist of reason, as opposed to a philosopher properly so called, namely a legislator of reason (A839/B867). 'Naturalist' also literally refers to a *Naturalist* (Kant's original term in German), a title that is itself ambiguous. One can be a *Naturalist* simply in virtue of following the principle that "in a natural science everything must be explained *naturally*" (GTP, 8: 178). In a more technical sense, a *Naturalist* is one who approaches natural inquiry with a "naturalistic" as opposed to "scientific" method: if the latter method involves a systematic procedure and the use of artificial means for gaining insights about nature, the former is restricted to a descriptive knowledge of nature based on observations by our naturally endowed faculties, such as eyes (A855/B883). I use the qualifier 'philosophical' to suggest that the kind of naturalist that represents Kant's interest is one who seeks to uncover the natural *causes* of phenomena.

the devastating 1755 Lisbon earthquake.[15] One of them, "On the Causes of Earthquakes" (1756), opens with the following proposition.

> Great events that affect the fate of all mankind rightly arouse that commendable curiosity, which is stimulated by all that is extraordinary and typically looks into the causes of such events. In such cases, the natural philosopher's obligation to the public is to give an account of the insights yielded by observation and investigation. (VUE, 1: 419)

Specifically, the philosophical naturalist must look into the *natural*, *law-governed* causes of phenomena. Kant already made a case for this practice—against those defenders of religion who liked to invoke naïve teleology—in the "Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens" (1755). To explain what makes the island of Jamaica inhabitable, for example, "the naturalist must find the natural causes of this in the most universal properties of the air [and of heat]" and in accordance with "the universal laws of nature," without presuming any special purposes (NTH, 1: 224–25).

Kant uses this model of natural-causal inquiry to compare rational beings on different planets. Such comparison is not a mere fiction, he argues, but accords with a natural law akin to the Newtonian law of universal gravitation. The putative law goes as follows:

> the perfection of the spiritual world as well as of the material world increases and progresses in the planets from Mercury on to Saturn . . . in a correct sequence of degrees in proportion to their distances from the Sun. (NTH, 1: 360)

Of the then-known planets in our solar system, Mercury is the closest to the Sun, Jupiter and Saturn are the furthest, and the Earth is somewhere in between. Accordingly, Kant submits two propositions that are "more than

[15] The timing of the Lisbon earthquake appeared to be just as significant as its disastrous material impact. It struck Lisbon on November 1, 1755, the All Saints Day. This might be the reason why it inspired debates among philosophers, natural scientists, and theologians alike (see the essays collected in Braun and Radner 2005). The exchange between Voltaire and Rousseau represented the philosophical quarter of the debate (Dynes 2000; Marques 2005). Regarding the impact on Kant's philosophy, see Larsen 2006. As we shall see, Kant is most concerned about defending the need to seek natural-causal, as opposed to supernatural or naïve teleological, explanations of phenomena like earthquakes.

probable conjecture[s]," with "a degree of credibility that is not far removed from an established certainty":

(a) from Mercury, through Earth, to Saturn, the matter that constitutes the inhabitants of various planets goes from the coarser to the finer and lighter;
(b) the same inhabitants are less or more excellent in their abilities to form clear concepts and thoughts, insofar as these "intellectual abilities have a necessary dependence on the material of the machine they inhabit" (1: 358–59).

Human beings—as earthbound rational creatures, or what Kant would later call a "race [*Rasse*]" when contrasted with the "rational beings on other planets, as a multitude of creatures arising from one demiurge" (Anth, 7: 331)—are therefore positioned at the midpoint on the spectrum of intelligence.

> If the idea of the most sublime classes of rational creatures that inhabit Jupiter or Saturn arouses their jealousy and humiliates them by the knowledge of their own baseness, then they can be satisfied again and comforted by the sight of the low stages on the planets Venus and Mercury, which are lowered far below the perfection of human nature. . . . On the one hand, we saw thinking creatures among whom a Greenlander or Hottentot would be Newton, on the other hand, those who would admire [*bewundern*] him as an ape. (1: 359–60)

The reference to "a Greenlander or Hottentot" in this passage is suggestive. The point is that, to the Venusians and Mercurians, who belong in a "class [of rational beings that] borders more closely on the lack of reason" (1: 362), *even* a Greenlander or "Hottentot" (derogatory reference to a South-African population) would come across as very intelligent.

To the Kantian naturalist, a similar material principle underlies the intellectual inferiority of a Venusian or Mercurian (relative to the higher planetarians) and that of a Greenlander or "Hottentot" (relative to the more intelligent humans). Roughly speaking, a class of rational beings is more or less intelligent depending on how far from the Sun their native habitat is, where their class developed its unique characteristics in adaptation to the local climate (as defined by properties of air and heat).[16] Apropos the human

[16] On the surface, this principle would not apply to the Greenlandic Inuit, who lived in the polar zone. To Kant, however, the problem is that this people lived *too far* from the source of heat. As he

being as such (as a species), "his ability to think rationally" is limited by "the constitution of the matter to which he is bound and which is proportionate to the distance from the Sun." This limitation is not equally materialized in all members of the species: provided it takes several stages for the human being to approximate "the purpose of his being," *some* humans may advance far less than others and "remain at [an early] stage of development." For instance, they may never develop the "faculty of combining abstracted concepts and controlling the tendencies of the passions by the free application of insights" (1: 355–56). While Kant does not yet have a theory of race to explain these purported differences explicitly along the racial lines, his insinuation that Greenlanders and "Hottentots" are among the least developed of all humans in terms of their intelligence—coupled with his interest in understanding this kind of alleged differences in naturalistic terms—is already an ominous sign.

Another relevant development in Kant's early thinking about natural philosophy concerns the production of organisms (plants and animals), a topic that he touches on in "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God" (1763). In this essay, he continues to defend the philosophical naturalist's practice of "explaining any of the major arrangements in the world by appealing to the universal laws of nature" without invoking "forces which have been especially invented for the purpose" (BDG, 2: 148). The naturalist thereby presupposes "a great unity in nature, in respect of the adequacy of a single cause to account for many different kinds of consequences" (2: 113). Organisms pose a challenge, however, whose "initial generation" cannot be explained as "a mechanical effect incidentally arising from the universal laws of nature." The origin must instead be supernatural. This can be viewed in two ways: one may either attribute each organic formation "immediately to a divine action, which is performed at every mating," or grant that the first divine arrangement of organisms gave them a suitability (*Tauglichkeit*) "not merely to develop [*entwickeln*] their kind [*Gleichen*] thereafter in accordance with a natural law, but truly to generate [*erzeugen*] their kind." Kant supports the latter view: "one must concede to the things of nature a possibility . . . of producing their effects in

will show in his essays on race, *extreme* cold and extreme heat can impact the human development in similar ways.

accordance with universal laws" (2: 114–15; see BDG, 2: 107–8, 126–27; V-Met/Herder, 28: 49–50).[17]

Thus, in the case of organisms we seem to have run into the limits of mechanical explanations. No matter how far we go with such explanations, there is always something left to be comprehended. For example, even if one could fully understand the "entire mechanical organisation" of a human being, one would still be "amazed at the way in which it is possible for a human being to be both so delicately constituted and yet be capable of surviving for so long in spite of all the numerous causes which threaten its wellbeing" (BDG, 2: 152).

This sense of wonder about the peculiarity of organic beings is also evident in Kant's thinking about metaphysics during this period. The "Metaphysik Herder" (1762–64), for instance, contains a sketch of the metaphysical foundations of a theory of nature (*Naturlehre*).[18] The sketch includes a division of special (as opposed to universal) physics into theories about dead matter (such as minerals), plants, and animals in general (V-Met/Herder, 28: 158–60). Then, in the announcement about his metaphysics course for the winter semester of 1765–66, Kant states that he will divide the part on corporeal nature into two sciences: the first examines all the living beings that are sensible to us, while the second treats all the dead ones (NEV, 2: 309). We can find a similar distinction between dead matter and living beings in the "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics" (1766). Dead matter is characterized by "solidity, extension and shape," the manifestations of which admit none other than physical-mechanical explanations. By contrast, living beings operate in accordance with other "particular causal laws," which are called *organic* "in so far as corporeal beings are the mediating causes of their effects in the material world" (TU, 2: 329). Kant then offers a qualified defense of the vitalist mode of explanation with respect to these beings:

> the appeal to immaterial principles is the resort of lazy philosophy. For that reason, explanation of this sort is to be avoided at all costs, if the causes of phenomena in the world, which are based upon the laws of the motion of mere matter and which are uniquely and alone capable of intelligibility, are

[17] For a detailed study of Kant's view about the limits of a mechanical explanation of organic formation in the "Only Possible Argument," see Ferrini 2000: 303–11.

[18] In a letter written in December 1765, Kant mentioned a plan to publish two essays entitled "Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Philosophy [*Naturwissenschaft*]" and "Metaphysical Foundations of Practical Philosophy" (Br, 10: 56). A few months later, he wrote that "the true and lasting welfare of the human race depends on metaphysics" (10: 70).

> to be known in their full extent. Nonetheless, I am convinced that *Stahl*, who is disposed to explain animal processes in organic terms, was frequently closer to the truth than *Hofmann* or *Boerhaave*, to name but a few. (2: 331)[19]

In other words, Kant grants that the mechanistic approach, in strictly adhering to physical-mechanical causes, is "a more philosophical method" and that this method is "generally successful" and "alone . . . of use in science." Still, it cannot make intelligible the principles of life (2: 331).[20]

I will return to these reflections on the possibility of living beings later. For now, I want to point out that they took place at a time when Kant made a turn, purportedly inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, "to honor human beings" and to value theoretical knowledge only in view of its contribution to humanity (Bem, 20: 44). The "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764) officially inaugurated this Rousseauian turn.[21] Here we encounter some of Kant's most notorious claims about nonwhites and non-Westerners. For instance, he asserts that the difference between "the Negroes of Africa" and "the whites," as two human lineages (*Menschengeschlechter*), is "just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color."[22] Thus, the fact that a "Negro carpenter" mentioned in a travelogue is "completely black from head to foot" strikes Kant as "a distinct proof that what he said was stupid." He takes the "savages . . . of North America," who he would later classify as a separate race, to be exceptionally lacking in feelings, particularly "feeling for the beautiful in the moral sense." And those "in the Orient" are said to have an "inflamed power of imagination" but "no conception of the morally beautiful." By contrast, the European man is not only endowed with all sorts of feelings and inclinations but also able to interweave

[19] Kant is referring to Georg Ernst Stahl (1659–1734), Friedrich Hoffmann (1660–1742), and Herman Boerhaave (1668–1738). On the relevant historical context, see Zammito 2018: 13–36.

[20] For an illuminating analysis of Kant's position in its (textual and historical) context, see Ferrini 2000: 311–28.

[21] On the lasting impact of the Rousseauian turn on Kant's philosophical development, see Velkley 1989.

[22] This claim follows an approving reference to David Hume's remarks about blacks in "Of National Characters." Kant would invoke those remarks again in his geography course in 1792 (V-PG/Dohna, 26.2: 1132). Hume's essay first appeared in 1748. The notorious footnote about "Negroes" was added in 1753/54, which extended to all nonwhites as "naturally inferior to the Whites." Hume then revised the footnote in the posthumously published 1777 edition, limiting the claim of natural inferiority to "Negroes" (Hume 1826: 236). For a comparison of the two versions of the footnote, see Eze 1997: 33, 37. For contextualized analyses of Hume's views on race, see Eze 2000; Garrett 2004; Sebastiani 2011; Willis 2016.

them "with so much that is moral" that he—and he "alone"—has found a way to make them "proper" (GSE, 2: 252–55).

Such comments about various human populations in the "Observations"—or the passing ones made in the "Universal Natural History" (1755)—did not come out of nowhere. Rather, they reflected Kant's burgeoning interest in the phenomenon of human differences, a phenomenon that he evidently found important to humanity (much as he thought earthquake was important). The discipline where he deposited select data about this phenomenon is physical geography, on which he started lecturing around 1756. In the 1757 announcement about this course, he specified that, in the part on the animal kingdom, he would compare humans "in respect of their differences in natural shape and colour in various regions of the Earth"—so as to explain, among other things, "those tendencies of human beings that are derived from the zone in which they live, the diversity of their prejudices and way[s] of thinking" (EACG, 2: 9). Kant did not pioneer a lecture course on such topics out of mere curiosity. Rather, as he put it in a later course announcement (1765), he intended his geography lectures to provide a "compendium of the things which might prepare [the students] and serve them for the exercise of practical reason" (NEV, 2: 312). This claim reflects the pragmatic spirit of the Rousseauian turn that orients theoretical knowledge toward human utility (I explained this pragmatic orientation in Chapter 1).

Setting aside for now what this orientation—or, for that matter, Kant's purportedly Rousseauian claim to "honor human beings"—comes down to, I shall draw attention to the notes that he prepared around 1757–59, or the so-called *Diktattext* (Adickes 1911: 9–11).[23] Much of the *Physical Geography* (1802) that Kant entrusted Friedrich Theodor Rink to edit—from §53 (PG, 9: 273) onward—was based on those notes. The *Diktattext* contains an account of various human populations around the world. Although this account is mostly an aggregate of descriptions gleaned from travel reports, Kant occasionally also ventures to speculate about the most likely natural causes of such phenomena as hereditary skin colors. These speculations both reflect his basic commitments as a *Naturforscher* and offer a glimpse into how his raciology might have developed alongside his still evolving

[23] Werner Stark finds 'Diktattext' misleading, as it gives an unsupported impression that "Kant actually used this text not only pro forma for his teaching into the 1770s or even into the beginning of the 1780s, but literally dictated it" (2011a: 73). According to Stark, the other major source of the *Physical Geography* is a set of student notes from Kant's course in the summer term of 1774 (2011a: 83).

approaches to natural science. It is also worth noting that those reflections are often mixed with what may strike us as aesthetic and ethical appraisals of different populations but what Kant would bring under the umbrella of natural science—much as he, in the "Universal Natural History," connected degrees of intelligence with various material conditions of embodiment.[24]

At the basis of Kant's comparison of various human populations is a division of the Earth into separate "zones": two torrid zones around the equator, two frigid zones between the polar circles and the poles in both hemispheres, and two temperate zones between the torrid zones and the polar circles (PG, 9: 177). This division serves as an organizing principle for the section of the *Physical Geography* that is based on the *Diktattext* and concerned with humans specifically.[25] Overall, humans are differentiated with respect to "form [*Bildung*] and colour" by their native zones. Inhabitants at the two extremes of the Earth—in both torrid and polar regions—are said to have similar characteristics, as "great cold seems to have the same effect as great heat." The arctic population of Greenlanders, for instance, resembles the torrid populations in having "a brown complexion and black hair . . . a very scanty beard . . . a wide and flat face, and a large mouth." By contrast, populations in the temperate zones have "fair skin and hair." Among them are found "perhaps the tallest and most attractive of the Earth's peoples," who live "along the line of longitude running through Germany, and some degrees on either side" (9: 311; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 85–86).

Kant then zeros in on the black skin, referring to "Negroes" as "the truly black people." He is intrigued by the *heredity* of this skin color, as suggested by three observations. First, "Europeans who live in the torrid zones do not become Negroes, even after many generations, but retain their European form and colour." Second, the interbreeding of blacks and whites produces hybrids or mulattos. Third, without interbreeding with whites, "Negroes, even in Virginia, remain Negroes for many generations."[26] Kant the natural

[24] On the connection between Kant's treatment of living beings, including humans, in the *Physical Geography* and his account of nature in the "Universal Natural History," see Cooper 2019. Importantly, this article also highlights the methodological continuity between the *Physical Geography* and Kant's critical philosophy of nature, as both exhibit an interest in the systematization of nature.

[25] Copies of the *Diktattext* were in circulation, and its content is reflected in some of the manuscripts on physical geography available to us today (Adickes 1911: 47, 279). Although the original notes are now lost, the so-called Holstein manuscript (V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 7–320) is a close copy thereof (Stark 2011a: 72). For this reason, when I cite from the *Physical Geography*, I will also include corroborating segments from the Holstein manuscript wherever applicable. Important discrepancies will be noted.

[26] This reference to the Virginian "Negroes" suggests that Kant was somewhat knowledgeable about race-based chattel slavery. He also seemed aware of—without showing any concern about—its

philosopher wants to know the *cause* of this phenomenon. He dismisses the biblical "curse of Ham" explanation, according to which Ham was "punished by God with a black colour, which is now handed down to his descendants" (we will learn more about this once common explanation in Chapter 4). Moving on to the opinions of "natural philosophers [*Physiker*]," Kant expresses sympathy for the hypothesis that posits climate—especially a region's temperature—as the cause. He recognizes the difficulty of specifying the relevant causal mechanism: "How the skin is able to acquire so accidental a thing as colour cannot be explained quite so easily." But he also points out that nature provides ample examples of this sort, such as how one could get a "white race [*Race*]" of chickens that "would not easily revert to anything else" (PG, 9: 312–14; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 88–91).[27]

Kant also associates many other "inborn characteristics" with climates. Here are a range of examples corresponding to the various zones mentioned above.

> In the torrid zones, humans mature more quickly in all aspects than in the temperate zones, but they fail to reach the same [degree of] perfection. Humanity has its highest degree of perfection in the white race [*Race der Weißen*]. The yellow Indians have a somewhat lesser talent. The Negroes are much lower, and lowest of all is part of the American races [*Völkerschaften*]. (PG, 9: 316)[28]

> The Moors and other people of the tropics can in general run astonishingly quickly. Like other savages, they usually have greater strength than other, civilized people, which is due to the free movement they are allowed in childhood. The Hottentots can perceive a ship with the naked eye at the same distance that a European can with a telescope. (9: 316)

> Don Ulloa notes that in Cartagena in America [a port city on Colombia's Caribbean coast] and the surrounding regions the people become very

brutal practices: "the Moors have a thick skin, and for this reason when they are punished they are whipped not with sticks but with split canes, so that the blood may find a way out and not suppurate under the thick skin" (PG, 9: 313; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 89).

[27] Much as he would later do in his writings on race, Kant applies the concept "race [*Race*]" to animals more generally, such as horses and sheep (PG, 9: 321, 324; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 103–4).

[28] Unlike the ensuing passages, this passage on racial ranking has no close counterpart in the Holstein manuscript. Werner Stark has located a corresponding passage in the Barth manuscript instead, albeit with two notable differences: in the Barth manuscript, the reference is to the plural white *races* as opposed to a single white race, and the subsequent exposition follows a different direction than the one found in the *Physical Geography* (Start 2011b: 87–89). On the Barth manuscript (uncertainly dated to 1782), see Adickes 1911: 102–22, 162–71.

> clever [*klug*] very early, but their reason does not continue to grow at the same rate thereafter.[29] The inhabitants of the hottest zone are exceptionally indolent [*träge*]. In some cases, this laziness [*Faulheit*] is tempered to an extent by the government and by force. (9: 316)[30]

> The Ostyaks, Samoyeds, Semljans, Lapps, Greenlanders, and the inhabitants of the coasts of the Davis Straits are similarly timorous, lazy, and superstitious, and share the love of strong drink. But they differ in the matter of jealousy because their climate does not provide such a strong stimulus to sensuality. (9: 317)

> The inhabitant of the temperate zone, especially in its central part, is more beautiful in body, harder working, more witty, more moderate in his passions, and more sensible than any other kind of people in the world. Consequently, these people have always taught the rest [of the world], and vanquished them by the use of weapons. (9: 317–18).

If one asks about the causes of these various formations and natural aptitudes (*Naturelle*) in humans, Kant submits, one can again look at how other animals vary and change after being "transported to a different climate, different air and food, etc." (9: 317; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 92–97).

Before long, Kant would come to recognize that a simple climate hypothesis is inadequate for explaining organic formation in general and the heredity of skin color in particular (I will discuss the prolonged historical controversy over the climate hypothesis in Chapter 4). His remarks about organic production in "The Only Possible Argument" (1763), mentioned above, already marked a fundamental shift in his thinking about natural science that would pave the way for his pursuit of a more satisfying explanation. As this pursuit stretched over three race essays from 1775 to 1788, Kant would become ever more attentive to methodological issues and to larger problems concerning scientific knowledge about organic beings. To understand why, we can take

[29] Antonio de Ulloa (1716–95) was a Spanish explorer, astronomer, and colonial administrator. He is Kant's go-to source on the Americans, being "an extremely important witness, who knew the inhabitants of America in both hemispheres" (GTP, 8: 175). For a biography of Ulloa that speaks to this reputation, see Whitaker 1935.

[30] The claim of indolence or laziness would remain a constant theme in Kant's later remarks about the race of Amerindians (Lu-Adler 2022b). And the proposition that laziness may be somewhat tempered by force would play a notable role in his remarks about "Negroes," whom he portrays as natural slaves (Lu-Adler 2022c).

a look at his theory of hypothesis, with special attention to the status of metaphysical postulates (section 3.4). Clarifying this status will matter to Kant's handling of some fundamental challenges to his first race essay (section 3.5).

## 3.4. A Theory of Hypothesis for the Kantian *Naturforscher*

To Kant, hypotheses are "indispensable" in the investigation of nature: they are "experiments of the understanding," whereby we "approach many a truth along the path of probability" (R2675 [1753–59], 16: 463). Moreover, one often has to sift through existing hypotheses about a given phenomenon "in order to forge new paths of research" (FBZE, 1: 471).[31] Unsurprisingly, then, a core practice in Kant's scientific writings is to evaluate competing hypotheses as a way to develop his own answer to a question. This practice will eventually lead him to theorize about the nature of hypothesis and the standards of assessment. I will examine his theory and practice to foreground the aspects that can illuminate how he treats hypotheses and other types of suppositions in his race essays.

Kant practiced the method of hypothesis before he theorized about it. His early practices already reflected certain theoretical commitments, however. A telling example is "The Question, Whether the Earth Is Ageing, Considered from a Physical Point of View" (1754). In this essay, Kant examines four hypotheses proposed by others to account for the aging of the Earth. He considers the first three in terms of whether it is self-consistent, how precise its estimates are, and to what extent its predictions are supported by observations (FEV, 1: 202–9). Rejecting all three, he arrives at his own hypothesis of "a single cause for the change in the figure of the Earth that may be relied upon with certainty" (in short, the change is a "ceaseless effect of the rain"), supporting it with observations that are "certain and sure" (1: 209–10). Meanwhile, Kant reserves a special consideration for the fourth hypothesis. It posits "a general 'world spirit', an imperceptible but universally active principle, as the secret driving force of nature," the "gradual exhaustion" of which explains the aging of nature (1: 203). While no particular observations can be adduced to test this hypothesis (because it makes no determinable

[31] This statement is from Kant's third and final essay on earthquakes, "Continued Observations on the Earthquakes That Have Been Experienced for Some Time" (1756). In this essay, he critically examines various hypotheses about the cause of earthquakes, especially the recent Lisbon earthquake, before submitting his own.

predictions), Kant grants that it is "not so opposed to sound natural science and observation as one might think" (1: 211). Thus, he can only say that he has treated the question about the aging of the Earth searchingly (*prüfend*) but not conclusively (1: 213).

Besides agreement with empirical observations, Kant occasionally prioritizes other criteria for assessing hypotheses. He may criticize a hypothesis for assuming an unintelligible ground of explanation and having to rely on auxiliary hypotheses to do the explanatory work (GSK, 1: 60). Additionally, a hypothesis must be consistent with the already proven laws of nature (for example, the Newtonian law of attraction); it should assume as few fundamental natural forces as possible and, at any rate, assume only the ones that are certain, simple, and universal; and it should be fruitful in terms of being able to explain a wide range of phenomena. Meanwhile, one should never judge a hypothesis according to "geometrical strictness" or "mathematical infallibility" (NTH, 1: 234–36). These considerations together allow one to know "at once how to distinguish the unbridled excesses of a craving for novelty from the secure and careful judgements that have the *evidence of experience and of rational credibility* on their side" (FBZE, 1: 471, emphasis added).

Kant's logical theory of hypothesis articulates the implied standards of those early practices. He begins by defining 'hypothesis' as "an opinion concerning the truth of a ground *based on its sufficiency for the consequence*" (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 220).[32] In principle, a hypothesis can become a "theory" or "certainty," if all the consequences following from it are "true and agree with what is given." Since we are rarely in the position to deduce each and every possible consequence of any given hypothesis, however, we must strive instead for its sufficiency for all the consequences that we have been able to draw from it (24: 220–21). Such a hypothesis is further confirmed if it is uniquely explanatory, in that "there can be no other from which one could explain just as many consequences" (24: 223), and it is "strengthened by other things of which we are assured"—for example, by its connection to related theories that have already been proven (24: 220). Meanwhile, it must embody "unity," needing no supplementary or subsidiary hypotheses to

[32] Kant's logical account of hypothesis builds on but also significantly departs from §§181–90 of Meier 1752. In particular, Kant takes issue with the latter's reference to hypotheses as "arbitrary truths" (arbitrary in the sense of depending on our subjective choices), contending that hypothesis is "not . . . an arbitrary proposition at all but rather an opinion based on certain grounds a posteriori, which are sufficient for these consequences or those" (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 230). For an analysis of Kant's theory of hypothesis in the relevant historical context, see Demarest and Van den Berg 2022.

explain what it was introduced to explain (24: 223). The goal is not to arrive at what is "apodeictically certain," however. For a hypothesis can at best approximate certainty or obtain an "analogue" to it (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 887–88; see Log, 9: 84–85; V-Ph/Danzinger, 29: 103).

Importantly, the analogue to certainty that Kant has in mind is not reducible to high probability. The probability of a hypothesis depends on how many consequences can be derived from it. A high degree of probability is necessary but not sufficient for the near certainty of the hypothesis. For the same consequences derivable from it may also be drawn "from other grounds." Other things being equal, what gives one hypothesis out of many an analogue to certainty is that it contains "fully certain" elements. These include (1) the "possibility" of the assumed ground, (2) its unity as the single ground for explaining a multiplicity of consequences without having to enlist the assistance of new hypotheses, and (3) its consequential relation (*consequentia*) to what is inferred from it (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 887–89; see V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 746).

This account of hypothetic certainty has a significant implication: while hypotheses are indispensable to natural science, they do not properly belong in metaphysics. On Kant's account, "no hypotheses at all occur" in metaphysics partly thanks to its demand for apodeictic certainty and partly for its inability to satisfy condition (1) just mentioned. The supposition "that the soul of man can have an effect in the world even without the body," for instance, should not be admitted, because "I cannot prove the possibility of such affection," possibility being that which "must always be given through experience" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 889).

It is not that metaphysical propositions are incapable of proofs. Rather, they require an altogether different kind of proof—neither an empirical one, which only delivers "empirical certainty" (as appropriate for hypotheses), nor the sort that gives rise to mathematical or "intuitively apodeictic" certainty, which "no proposition in philosophy can have." If anything, a proof may establish the apodeictic certainty that is characteristic of metaphysical propositions by tracing them to certain "commands" of reason (24: 891–92). When Kant does say "metaphysics also has hypotheses," he is quick to add that it does so "not in a theoretical respect, but in a practical one" (V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 746). This refers to propositions that are not meant "to explain something," but held as "necessary in a practical respect." They amount to "legislations of reason" (24: 750–51). As such, they are strictly speaking "postulated (*per thesin*)," rather than hypothesized or "supposed (*per hypothesin*)" (A633/B661; see V-Met/Mron, 29: 918; WDO, 8: 141).

This point will prove key to the development of Kant's theory of race in the 1780s.

All the characteristic elements of a Kantian account of hypothesis are consolidated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* ("first *Critique*" henceforth). A hypothesis must be explanatory with respect to a known effect. It must be formed "under the strict oversight of reason," if it is to contain something "fully certain and not invented, or a mere opinion, and that is the possibility of the [posited] object itself." The possibility in question is not just a logical possibility on account of being "free of contradiction," but a *real possibility* in accordance with "the conditions of possible experience," which are precisely "conditions of the possibility of things" for us (A770–71/B798–99). In addition, a hypothesis must meet the various conditions set down in the logic lectures (B115).

As for metaphysical presuppositions, although they are not hypotheses strictly so called, they can affect how we investigate nature. Kant therefore finds it important to eliminate—or at least neutralize the influence of—those presuppositions that can hinder the investigations. A case in point is the "metaphysical presupposition . . . that the *real* in space . . . is everywhere one and the same, and can be differentiated only according to its extensive magnitude." Some of the "students of nature," Kant claims, are implicitly if unwittingly committed to this presupposition. It "can have no ground in experience," however. Kant's advice is not to prove it as simply false (no such proof is forthcoming), but to "obviate the alleged necessity of the presupposition that the difference in question cannot be explained except by the assumption of empty spaces." The goal is to free the understanding "to think of this difference in another way" (A173–74/B215–16).[33]

This account of hypothesis offers an angle for understanding the direction Kant would go after his first essay on race. In that essay, as I mentioned in section 3.2, Kant listed two causes to explain hereditary differences among humans: (a) a *purposive cause* consisting in certain original germs and natural predispositions, on account of which the human species could survive and propagate in all kinds of future circumstances; (b) *natural causes*, mainly climates, which occasion the various developments of those original germs and predispositions, resulting in more or less hereditary characteristics

[33] What is also relevant here is Kant's account of "the hypothetical use of reason" in the first *Critique*, which is said to be "regulative" as opposed to "constitutive" (A646–47/B674–75). On the relation between the account of the hypothetical use of reason and Kant's theory of scientific hypothesis, see Cooper 2022.

(VRM, 2: 234–36). Now we ask: are (a) and (b) two separate hypotheses? Or do they together form a single, overarching hypothesis? Or is (b) alone a hypothesis properly so called?

The answer is not immediately clear as far as Kant's first essay on race is concerned. He makes a few suggestive claims, though. First, there is no way to verify the claim about the existence of original germs and predispositions by direct experience: one cannot find the original human form unaltered anywhere in the world now (VRM, 2: 440). Second, (a) nonetheless needs some kind of proof (*Beweis*). As we saw in section 3.2, Kant has offered a comparative proof by showing the explanatory inadequacy of such alternatives as appeals to chance and to the universal mechanical laws. The mere capacity for an organic being to "propagate its adopted character," he submits, is "already proof enough that a particular germ or natural predisposition for it was to be found," even where "nothing purposive shows itself" (2: 435). Third, Kant also provides specific accounts of *how* the various racial characteristics may be derived from the germs-cum-climates model. He refers to these as "conjectures" that suffice to "counterbalance other conjectures" (2: 440).

Kant thereby implicitly appeals to his own criteria for the near certainty of a hypothesis: other things being equal, it prevails over the alternatives if it provides a *single* ground for explaining multiple phenomena and if one can specify the *consequential* relation between these phenomena and the explanatory ground. It is not obvious, though, that other things are equal. In particular, if the supposition of germs and natural predispositions in the original human phylum is part of Kant's hypothesis, how would he show that this supposed explanatory ground is itself a real possibility, not just something fabricated for the sake of explanatory unity? One move Kant can make to get around this question is to say that the assumption of original germs and natural predispositions is more like a rational *postulate*—as *demanded by reason*—than a typical scientific hypothesis, only the latter of which requires empirical proof. We will see clear indications of this approach in his 1785 and 1788 essays on race. Both essays, as I suggested in section 3.2, feature higher-order reflections on the role of reason in the philosophical naturalist's investigation of organic products. In the 1788 essay, in particular, we will see Kant making a concerted effort to defend and clarify the use of teleological principles in natural philosophy.[34]

[34] For a similar interpretation, see McNulty 2022.

## 3.5. Interlude: Kant's Methodological Turn after His First Essay on Race

To provide some context for the direction that Kant would take in the 1780s, let us look at some specifics of his initial conjectures about how racial characteristics might have been formed as adaptive responses to different climates. Making such conjectures meant that Kant would have to either substantiate them by supplying further empirical evidence, for instance, or neutralize the need to do so. He would opt for the latter strategy after his first (1775/77) essay on race, partly under the pressure from more empirically minded opponents. This decision to take a methodological turn would then shape his approach in the next two race essays.

Kant's main case study in the 1775/77 essay is "the *Hunnish* (Mongolian or Kalmuckian) race" (VRM, 2: 432) or the race of "Copper-reds (Americans)" (2: 441). This race is said to have such features as beardless chin, flat face, red-brown skin color, and "coldness and insensitivity of the natural disposition" (2: 433) or a natural aptitude (*Naturell*) that "betrays a half extinguished life power [*Lebenskraft*] that can be viewed most easily as the effect of a cold region of the world" (2: 438). By the cold region, Kant is referring to the glacial zone. Although the race in question is "now encountered in its greatest completeness in a milder region," Kant claims that it originated in the northern cold, where the Kalmuckian form (*Bildung*) "takes root over a long series of generations in the same climate until it becomes a persistent race which preserves itself" even in subsequent migrations to milder climates. The basic law that links the cold of the glacial zone to the supposed Kalmuckian characteristics is this: "In this desiccating region all unfolding through which the body merely wastes its fluids must gradually be restrained." So "the germs of the hair growth are suppressed in time," the face becomes flatter to reduce exposure of the least covered body part, and so on. As for the skin color, red brown forms in the cold climate "as an effect of aerial acid" (2: 436–38).

The causal mechanism that, according to Kant, underlies the formation of the red-brown skin is the same as what explains all the other basic skin colors (while, black, olive-yellow). Assuming that skin attests to the "self-help of Nature by means of a certain organization," he seeks to trace different colors of the four races "to the same [natural] cause." In particular, there must be a common "procedure for continuously removing what irritates the circulation of the blood," especially in view of the fact that "all animal blood contains iron" (VRM, 2: 439–40). Kant describes this procedure in terms of

the chemical theory that assumes phlogiston and (acidic and alkaline) salts as the basic agents. So, for example,

> the saline acidic or the phosphoric acidic or the volatile alkaline in the evacuating vessels of the skin would precipitate the iron particles in the reticulum as red or black or yellow. In the white, however, this iron that is dissolved in the fluids would not be precipitated at all and thereby would indicate at once the perfect mixture of the fluids and the strength of this human sort ahead of the others. (2: 440)

Kant then checks himself: "this is only sketchy enticement to investigation in a field which is too foreign to me for venturing even conjectures with any confidence" (2: 440).

The self-awareness that he was making conjectures in an unfamiliar field did not stop Kant from wanting to delve deeper. Although it would take him nearly another decade to publish his second essay on race, he apparently intended to write one soon after publishing the 1777 version of the first essay—partly due to popular interest in the subject, and partly because he was aware of the need to improve or expand on the first essay. He could pursue two routes: he could answer the "enticement to investigation" just mentioned, which would likely require more first-order empirical work; or he could focus on the higher-order task of refining and strengthening his overall theoretical framework by, for instance, clarifying his presupposition of original germs and natural predispositions. In two letters written after 1777, Kant suggested that he was more inclined toward the latter, although he would also have to address challenges to some of the empirical claims made in the 1775/77 essay.

In a letter to the publisher Johann G. I. Breitkopf in 1778, who had recently written to ask about his further plan, Kant acknowledged that "the subject of human races could use both a more thorough [*gründlichere*] and more illuminating [*einleuchtende*] treatment and greater detail" (Br, 10: 229, modified translation).[35] He did not feel ready to take up the more expansive project, though, partly because "it would have to be a separate book." He also pushed back against the suggestion that it be "part of a natural history": this would "necessitate new and extensive reading rather outside my field, since

[35] The full German text for this letter is included only in the Akademie collection of Kant's works published from 1922 onward. Breitkopf wrote to Kant on March 21, 1778 (Br, 10: 227–28), addressing the 1777 version of Kant's first essay on race.

natural history is not my specialty but only a hobby and my principal aim with respect to it is to use it to extend and correct our knowledge of mankind" (10: 230). In the terms that I will explain in Chapter 4, Kant seems to be distancing himself from the old Baconian notion of natural history as a comprehensive *descriptive* project that takes inventory of all there is in nature (by contrast, he will pursue a new kind of natural history, which is essentially a *causal* inquiry).[36]

Then, in 1779, Kant wrote that he should give priority to "a continuation of the treatise on human races" (Br, 10: 239). This time he was addressing Johann J. Engel (1741–1802). Engel edited the two-volume *Der Philosoph für die Welt* (1775–77) that contained the 1777 version of Kant's first race essay. He had written to Kant with further inquiries (Br, 10: 237–38). Kant reassured Engel, a prominent representative of the *Popularphilosophie* movement, that there would be no need to fear "windy hypotheses, or even a scholastic dryness." For the substance would be rich and popular in itself. Meanwhile, now that he could "determine so clearly the viewpoint from which one must consider the varieties of men" as to bring an element of certainty to this field, the treatise would be of some importance. As for those who would pay little attention to the physical (*das Physische*), their taste would still be satisfied by the "principles of a moral character of the various races of the human species." Leaving the said principles unspecified, Kant went on to claim that the materials for the new treatise had been "completely ready for some time," since he had been "prompted to rethink the subject further by Zimmermann's *Geographical History of Men* (wherein he judged the previous piece)." Kant again pleaded for more time, though, already having too much on his plate (Br, 10: 239).

Kant's remarks to Engel are worth noting for two reasons. First, he recognizes both the importance of popular appeal and the need to provide rigorous or scholastically correct arguments for his theory of race, even if this means working through windy (physical) hypotheses.[37] Second, this attention to rigor has much to do with the fact that Kant needs to answer other

[36] On Kant's precritical conception of natural history in its historical context, see Cooper 2017: 106–12.

[37] Popularity is a recurring theme in Kant's logic lectures. In general, he connects popularity with the aesthetic perfection of cognition and contrasts it with logical perfection or scholastic correctness. Emphasizing the need for a balanced combination of both, he rejects pedantry and gallantry alike, with their lopsided emphases on scholastic correctness and popularity respectively (Log, 9: 19–20, 37–41, 46–48; V-Lo/Donha, 24: 709, 714, 716, 779; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 795–96, 809–10, 814–15, 820–21, 848–49).

theorists, such as Eberhard A. W. Zimmermann (1743–1815) mentioned in the letter. The first volume of Zimmermann's *Geographische Geschichte des Menschen und der allgemein verbreiteten vierfüßigen Thiere* (1778–83) appeared in 1778.[38] Part I of the volume is on "omnipresent animals and their degenerations [*Ausartungen*]," beginning with a chapter on human beings (1778: 70–72).[39] Zimmermann, a naturalist specializing in geography and zoology, levels two basic objections against Kant in that chapter. First, some of Kant's empirical claims—for example, that Americans are beardless—are simply wrong. Countering such claims, Zimmermann insinuates that Kant cherry-picked travel reports that would agree with his *system* for the derivation of racial characteristics such as the Kalmuckian facial form. "Unfortunately for this system," Zimmermann writes sarcastically, one can find ample contravening evidence from other credible reports.

Second, Zimmermann finds Kant's racial classificatory system (and similar systems proposed by others) and the derivation of the races artificial. He proposes a more "natural" or "unforced" derivation of all the races from a single phylum (*Stamm*), which at the same time indicates how they might have dispersed from a single part of the earth: the earliest human beings resided somewhere in East Asia; as they gradually migrated to other regions of the Earth (largely due to needs), the influence of different climates (and diets) eventually turned them into "a Georgian, here a Negro, and there an Eskimo." Although Zimmermann presents this as a merely hypothetical idea (*Einfall*), he also provides preliminary considerations for why it is preferable than some alternatives, including agreement with available historical records, explanatory ease, and related theories (1778: 112–17).

In this way, Zimmermann restricts himself to an empirically testable explanation, being clearly weary of artificial system building when it comes to understanding human variations. Unlike what Kant will do, he shows no interest in the metaphysical presuppositions about nature that underlie the competing hypotheses. This may explain why Kant will not engage Zimmermann in his later essays on race. Philosophically speaking, the gulf between their approaches will only deepen in these essays, where Kant explicitly insists that only theoretically guided observations—not just any travel

[38] For a brief but illuminating biography of Zimmermann, followed by a contrast of his and Kant's views, see Mikkelsen 2013: 73–81.

[39] As I shall explain in Chapter 4, the theory of degeneration was commonly used to explain biological differences within the same animal species. While Kant apparently subscribed to this theory in the 1775/77 essay, he would abandon it in the 1885 and 1788 essays on race.

reports—can be used for testing hypotheses about how variations within the same human species happened. In other words, Kant will double down on the philosophical "system" that underpins his theory of race, a system that will render any empirical claims he makes about racial characteristics not only more potent but also less open to evidential counters than an empiricist naturalist like Zimmermann would allow.[40]

## 3.6. The Influence of Reason on the Investigation of Nature: Unity and Teleology

### 3.6.1. Systematic Unity and Regulative Principles of Reason in the First *Critique*

At the start of the 1775/77 essay on race, Kant signals that, with the division of human races he is about to give, he will provide a law-governed "natural system for the understanding." In such a system, there is unity in division. That is, all human races "belong to one and the same natural species."[41] This unity of species points to a single natural cause, Kant argues, namely the "generative power" in a common phylum from which all humans must have originated. Otherwise, one would have to assume "many local creations," a hypothesis that "needlessly multiplies the number of causes" (VRM, 2: 429–30). These remarks suggest that Kant's preference for one account of human differences over another is ultimately rooted in what he takes to be certain features of the human understanding, particularly its need to bring its objects "under laws" (2: 429). To justify the supposition of unity, a unity that moreover comes down to the unity of a purposive cause (namely, the generative power in a single original phylum), Kant will also have to consider the role that reason plays in guiding the understanding's investigation of nature in

[40] Like Kant, Zimmermann compares the races in terms of their intelligence and other features. For instance, one reason he has against locating the original humans in Africa is that white people are so much wiser (*klüger*) and so much more active (*thätiger*) than "Negroes" that one should not even compare the two. In Zimmermann's alternative history of humanity, the blond white Europeans far exceed the original human phylum in terms of "efficacy [*Wirksamkeit*], wisdom, and now and then even bodily strength" (1778: 116). That being said, Zimmermann does not have a philosophical framework like Kant's to make any of the alleged racial characteristics necessarily or irreversibly hereditary.

[41] The qualified reference to "natural species [*Naturgattung*]" is particularly important to Kant. He contrasts it with "school species [*Schulgattungen*]" (VRM, 2: 429). The significance of this contrast will become clear after we have considered competing classificatory systems in Chapter 4.

general and of organisms in particular. Let us now turn to his account of that role in the first *Critique*, the first (1781) edition of which appeared halfway between his 1777 and 1785 essays on race.

The first thing to note is the distinction between the understanding and reason. On Kant's account, these faculties operate on different kinds of materials, to bring about the unity of understanding (*Verstandeseinheit*) and the unity of reason (*Vernunfteinheit*), respectively. The understanding brings about an empirical unity or "unity of a possible experience" when applying itself "directly to the senses and their intuition, in order to determine their object." It does so by means of its pure concepts or categories (for example, *cause* and *effect*) and in accordance with synthetic a priori principles such as the *causal principle*. By this principle, "all alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect" or, simply, "everything which happens must have a cause." Such a principle "makes the unity of experience possible and borrows nothing from reason." Reason, by contrast, "has no immediate reference to [objects] and their intuition, but deals only with the understanding." It brings a systematic unity into our cognitions without thereby determining any object for us (A305–9/B362–65). That is,

> reason relates itself only to the use of the understanding . . . in order *to prescribe the direction toward a certain unity of which the understanding has no concept*, proceeding to comprehend all the actions of the understanding in respect of every object into an absolute whole. (A326–27/B383, emphasis added)

The italicized phrase makes a crucial point: the understanding is unable even to conceptualize the systematic unity of its cognitions, much less to pursue it on its own. Rather, only by "a demand of reason" can the understanding be brought "into thoroughgoing connection with itself," that is, into a system (A305/B362; see A475/B503).

Kant is careful in how he characterizes this role of reason: a principle of reason that expresses its demand for systematic unity can neither be a "principle of the understanding" for cognizing particular objects of experience, nor a "*constitutive* principle of reason" for extending our cognition in the supersensible realm, but only a "*regulative* principle of reason" for "the greatest possible continuation and extension of experience" (A509/B537; see A516–17/B544–45; KU, 5: 401–3).

Regulative principles, which concern nature as a whole, are not just optional heuristics for the investigators of nature. To see why, consider physicists who seek to explain sensible objects not as mere particulars, but as belonging in certain kinds and as causally interacting with one another in a law-governed way. They aim to uncover the properties and governing laws of objects qua metals, liquids, planets, and so forth; insofar as these again fall under the higher genus "body," they want to know whether there are laws that apply to all corporeal phenomena or whether the laws that are known to govern one variety of bodies apply to other varieties as well. In so doing, they presuppose a certain order within nature itself, which allows them to sort things into a system of genera and species and to bring the diverse laws for various species under a more general law for the shared genus. But where does this idea of a systematically ordered nature come from? After all, as Kant later puts it in the third *Critique* (1790),

> it may certainly be thought that . . . the specific diversity of the empirical laws of nature together with their effects could nevertheless be so great that it would be impossible for our understanding to discover in them an order that we can grasp, to divide its products into genera and species in order to use the principles for the explanation and the understanding of one for the explanation and comprehension of the other as well. (KU, 5: 185; see A650–51/B678–79)

To illustrate, consider the logical rule of comparing given representations so as to subordinate them under higher and higher concepts until the highest genus concept. This logical rule of genera would not apply to nature at all, Kant argues, if "among the appearances offering themselves to us there were such a great variety . . . that even the most acute human understanding, through comparison of one with another, could not detect the least similarity." We cannot rule out this possibility a posteriori. Rather, we must *presuppose* a priori that "sameness of kind" in the manifold of appearances is true of nature (A653–54/B681–82). Thus, the logical principle of genera, as a principle of homogeneity or unity in diversity, "would be without sense or application if it were not grounded on" a corresponding transcendental one (A656/B684).

With principles such as the transcendental principle of unity (homogeneity) just mentioned, reason "prescribes and seeks to bring about . . . the *systematic*" in cognitions of the understanding, namely their "interconnection

based on one principle." Reason thereby "postulates [*postulirt*] complete unity of the understanding's cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws." The ideas by which we conceive such a system are "not scooped from nature." Rather, "we question nature according to these ideas," which must have originated a priori (A645/B673, modified translation).

Take, for instance, the case of the analysts seeking to bring various kinds of minerals under ever higher genera with a view to finding the highest genus.

> The analysts . . . were able to reduce all salts to two main genera, acidic and alkaline, but they even attempted to regard this distinction as merely a variety or varied expression of one and the same fundamental material [*Grundstoff*]. They sought to get the several species of earths (the material of stone and even of metal) gradually down to three, and finally to two; still not satisfied, they . . . conjecture that behind these varieties there is a single genus or even indeed a common principle for both earths and salts. (A652–53/B680–81)

In this case, an indeterminate idea of some *Grundstoff* must underwrite the analysts' search for such a thing. Even to reduce particular matters to earths and salts, they need ideas of pure earth and pure salt, which "as far as their absolute purity is concerned, have their origin only in reason." This exemplifies "the influence of reason on the classifications of the investigator of nature [*Naturforscher*]" (A646/B674, modified translation). Otherwise, Kant asks rhetorically elsewhere,

> Could Linnaeus have hoped to outline [*entwerfen*] a system of nature if he had had to worry that if he found a stone that he called granite, this might differ in its internal constitution from every other stone which nevertheless looked just like it, and all he could hope to find were always individual things, as it were isolated for the understanding, and never a class of them that could be brought under concepts of genus and species? (EEKU, 20: 216)

What underpins the Linnaean quest to classify things in nature and bring them into an interconnected system of genera and species is what Kant calls "a *projected* unity."[42] Reason presents this unity "only as a problem," a unity

[42] Kant is referring to Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), whose magnum opus is *Systema Naturae* (first edition in 1735). I will discuss in Chapter 4 Linnaeus's classificatory system and its place in the history of the science of "race."

that nevertheless "helps to find a principle for the manifold and particular uses of the understanding" and thereby brings its cognitions into a system (A647/B675).

Thus, Kant argues, the presupposition of a certain order in nature makes "a legitimate and excellent regulative principle of reason," although it would be invalid if taken in the "constitutive" sense as a determinate cognition of how the world is structured in itself. As regulative, the presupposition not only licenses but also bids the investigator to seek particular orders in nature and regard them "as grounded in nature in general, even though it is underdetermined where or to what extent." In short, it "points the way toward systematic unity," but "without determining anything" (A668/B696). In this manner, reason "prepares the field for the understanding" with certain indeterminate, a priori presuppositions about nature in general, but leaves it to the understanding to determine, a posteriori, the specific connections among things and the laws that govern such connections (A657/B685).

The principles by which reason influences the work of a Kantian *Naturforscher* are objective in one sense and subjective in another. They have indirect objective validity with respect to empirical cognition: they "indicate the procedure in accordance with which the empirical and determinate use of the understanding in experience can be brought into thoroughgoing agreement with itself, by bringing it *as far as possible* into connection with the principle of thoroughgoing unity." They are subjective in that they are "taken not from the constitution of the object but from the interest of reason in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object." In its speculative (as opposed to practical) use, reason is driven by an interest in systematic unity. The subjective principles serving this interest are, strictly speaking, only "*maxims* of reason." There can be a variety of such maxims, Kant explains, which represent different and even seemingly incompatible "ways of thinking." Since they are not objective in the constitutive sense, however, any apparent conflict between them will only be "a variation and a reciprocal limitation of the methods" that serve reason's "single unified [speculative] interest" in systematicity (A665–66/B693–94).

Notably, Kant illustrates this point with a putative conflict "over the characteristics of human beings, animals or plants, or even of bodies in the mineral realm":

> some, e.g., assume special characters of peoples grounded in the phyletic origin [*Abstammung*], or even settled and hereditary differences between families, races [*Racen*], etc., while others, by contrast, fix their minds on the thought that nature has set up no predispositions [*Anlagen*] at all in this matter, and that all differences rest only on external chances. (A667/B695, modified translation)

The two views presented here will remain in conflict, Kant claims, "as long as they are held to be objective insights." There can be no appeal to "the constitution of the object" in this case, however, which "lies too deeply hidden for either [side] to be able to speak from an insight into the nature of the object." Rather, the conflict only reflects a "twofold interest of reason, where each party takes to heart one interest or the other, or affects to do so, hence either the maxim of the manifoldness of nature or that of the unity of nature." That is, the conflict is only a subjective one, resting on a "greater or lesser attachment" to one of the two maxims (A667/B695).

Although this is the only place in the first *Critique* where Kant mentions race and does so only in passing, the remarks just quoted are revealing. They capture a pivotal role that reason—on account of its speculative interest in systematic unity coupled with a unique inventory of ideas and principles—plays in Kant's scientific theory of race.[43] As I mentioned in section 3.2, in his 1785 race essay Kant explicitly treats the fundamental conflict between different explanations of the phenomenon of heredity as more a choice between rational maxims than a battle over empirical evidence. Specifically, it is the choice between the maxim of parsimony, which censures unnecessary multiplication of explanatory principles, and the maxim that nature always preserves itself. Both maxims are correct in themselves but give opposite verdicts as to whether one can posit special predispositions (*Anlagen*) to explain heredity. By choosing the second maxim, whereby he feels licensed to posit certain germs and predispositions in the original human phylum, Kant would not claim that nature is, objectively speaking, so constituted that it truly contains the assumed germs and predispositions. To borrow his terms in the first *Critique*, the ideas of germs and predispositions are not drawn from

[43] On the centrality of Kant's notion of systematic unity—and his conception of reason more generally—to his scientific theory of race, also see Mensch 2013: 92–109; Sandford 2018; Mateo and Stubenrauch 2022; McNulty 2022.

nature a posteriori but are indeterminate presuppositions—similar to the analysts' presupposition of a *Grundstoff*—that reason makes a priori thanks to its speculative interest in systematic unity. The warrant of those ideas therefore lies primarily in their ability to regulate and facilitate the philosophical naturalist's investigation of the relevant phenomena.

Another aspect of Kant's theory of race that showcases the pivotal role of reason concerns his account of "observation." At the beginning of his 1785 essay on race, he states:

> It is of great consequence to have previously determined the concept that one wants to elucidate through observation before questioning experience about it; for one finds in experience what one needs only if one knows in advance what to look for. . . . My intention at present is merely precisely to determine this concept of a *race*, provided there are any in the human species. (BBM, 8: 90)

By 'observation,' Kant does not mean just any experience, but "only *methodically* conducted experience" in accordance with "a guiding principle of what to search for" (GTP, 8: 161; see KU, 5:376).[44] To illustrate, take the idea that "the *human species* . . . could be divided in a system of natural history into *phylum* (or phyla), *races* or subspecies . . . and different *human sorts*." While Kant introduces it as "merely an idea of the way in which the greatest degree of manifoldness in the generation can be united by reason with the greatest unity of phyletic origin," it is meant to instigate and guide observations. So he continues:

> Whether there really is such an affinity in the human species must be decided through the observations that make known the unity of the phyletic origin. And here one sees clearly that one must be guided by a determinate principle merely in order to *observe*, i.e., to pay attention to that which could indicate the phyletic origin, . . . Someone who has not made his investigation according to that principle will have to search again. (GTP, 8: 164; see 8: 161)

[44] See Cooper 2021 for an analysis of Kant's theory of observation that directly bears on my arguments in sections 3.6 and 3.7 of this chapter. Also see Cooper 2017.

Thus, although one still needs empirical observations to confirm that diverse human populations belong to one and the same species (namely, share a single phyletic origin), the very pursuit of such observations is driven by an idea that reason has thought up beforehand in an attempt to bring unity into the given manifoldness.

The idea of a single original phylum from which all humans must have descended is analogous to the idea of *Grundstoff* that guides the analyst's search of a common principle for earths and salts. In both cases, the idea makes the investigator an attentive and principled observer, who knows what to look for (for example, evidence of a certain unity). What is at play here, Kant would add, is not "merely a device of reason for achieving economy," but an "idea, in accordance with which everyone presupposes that this unity of reason conforms to nature itself," in which case "reason does not beg but commands" (A653/B681). Of course, reason cannot simply impute a specific unity to nature in cases where it still needs to "be taught by" and "learn from" nature (Bxiii–xiv). So the claim is not that such a thing as the *Grundstoff* or the single phyletic origin "must be found, but rather that one must seek it for the benefit of reason" (A649/B677).

### 3.6.2. Kant on the Use of Teleological Principles in the 1788 Essay on Race

In his 1788 essay on race, Kant brought to bear all the critical claims I outlined in the preceding section—reason's essential interest in systematic unity, the regulative nature of the ideas and principles serving that interest, and reason's role in observations properly so called. As I indicated in section 3.2, Kant wrote the 1788 essay to address Georg Forster's challenge to his 1785 essay. The main theoretical disagreement between the two is over whether monogenism or polygenism is a better system for explaining human variations. Forster, as Kant describes his position, "finds it necessary to assume two original phyla in order to explain" the phenomenon of "at least one hereditary peculiarity among the different shapes of human beings, namely that of the Negro as opposed to the other human beings." Kant counters that "it is possible and indeed more appropriate to the philosophical mode of explanation [*Erklärungsart*]" to view the differences in question "as a development of purposive first predispositions implanted in one phylum" (GTP, 8: 168–69).

Kant defends this view not on account of having more facts on his side. Neither explanation can be verified or falsified by direct evidence: one cannot determine "the physical first origin of organic beings," because this origin "remains unfathomable . . . to human reason in general." Thus, much like what he said in the first *Critique* about the apparent conflict between different accounts of human variations, Kant would not see his disagreement with Forster as one over how objects are originally constituted in themselves. Instead, channeling his general theory of hypothesis (as I presented it in section 3.4), Kant defends monogenism mainly from methodological considerations. Polygenism, he contends, "does not procure the slightest further ease for the possibility of rational comprehension" than the supposition that "the germs are originally implanted in one and the same phylum and subsequently develop *purposively for the first general population*." The latter supposition, moreover, "carries with it the advantage of sparing us different local creations" (GTP, 8: 169).

Now, the point of contention between Kant and Forster is not just the number of phyletic origins one must assume, but what it would take for monogenism to do its explanatory work. How is it possible for humans who in Kant's view have radically different characteristics to come from one and the same original phylum? To account for this possibility, Kant reframes his earlier view and posits "*teleological* grounds of explanation," namely certain germs and predispositions as originally implanted in their common phylum, which could develop adaptively in different climates for "the preservation of their kind." But this raises the worry as to whether "the teleological mode of explanation . . . place[s] a new burden on the investigation of nature" (GTP, 8: 169). After all, by Kant's own account of hypothesis (as we saw in section 3.4), a supposed ground of explanation must, lest it be a mere fiction, be such that its real possibility can still be established somehow through experience. Kant reaffirms this point in an attempt to rule out yet another competing theory, namely vitalism:

> the same principle—that everything in natural science must be explained naturally—also indicates the boundaries of natural science. For one has reached its extreme boundary if one uses the last of all explanatory grounds that can still be confirmed by *experience*. Where these come to an end, and one must bring in self-concocted powers [*Kräften*] of matter following unheard-of and unverifiable laws, one has already gone beyond natural science. (8: 178–79; see 8: 181–82)

Does this mean that, to differentiate the assumption of a teleological ground of explanation in the form of original germs and predispositions from the vitalist approach, the investigator must prove it through experience?

Kant's response to this question is complicated, as one can expect. In a way that echoes his distinction of physical or natural-scientific hypotheses and metaphysical postulates (explained in section 3.4), he begins by differentiating physical and metaphysical investigations of nature:

> the investigation of nature . . . can pursue two paths: either the merely *theoretical* path or the *teleological* path, and with respect to the latter either as *physics*, using only such ends for its intention that can be known to us through experience, or as *metaphysics* using for its intention, in accordance with its calling, only an end that is fixed through pure reason. (GTP, 8: 159)

With this distinction between "natural ends" that rest on evidential proofs (*Beweisgründen*) of experience and ends that are established by pure reason, Kant seeks to procure a "warrant . . . to start from a teleological principle [*Princip*] where theory abandons us" in the investigation of hereditary human differences, particularly racial differences (8: 159).[45] A teleological ground of explanation must be posited a priori, he submits, so as to make the very possibility of organic beings comprehensible to the *human* reason (8: 179).

But this warrant for the use of teleological principles is at the same time limited by a theoretical interest to know the efficient (physical) causes of natural products. That is, their use must be "restricted to the extent that the right of *precedence* of the theoretical-speculative investigation to first try out its entire faculty in the matter is secured, and furthermore that subsequently this freedom shall remain available to it at all times" (GTP, 8: 160). In other words, the presupposition of a teleological starting point must leave as much as possible for the *physical investigator of nature* to explain in accordance with empirically known or knowable laws of nature. This investigator is still left with the task, for instance, of connecting the current state of things with their causes "according to laws of efficient causality, which we do not make up but derive from the powers of nature as they are presented to us now" (8: 161–62, modified translation).

[45] I take 'principle' in this context to mean something like an origin, basis, or source.

With hereditary racial differences in particular, one must show *how*—by what law-governed efficient-causal mechanisms—they may have resulted from "a gradually developing *original predisposition* placed into the phylum and restricted to a certain number according to the main differences of the influences exercised by the air [and sun]" (GTP, 8: 177). That is, one must be able to derive the different forms of humans "from laws of the gradual development of *original predispositions*" in the phylum of this species (8: 179). One must then seek "confirmation" for such a derivation in empirical observations of how various human populations are distributed in different climates, for example (8: 176). Meanwhile, the physical investigator of nature is under no obligation to determine the original phylum itself: "there can be no investigation in physics about the origin of all organization itself," the knowledge of which, if it is accessible to human reason at all, "would lie *outside* of natural science *in metaphysics*" (8: 179). It suffices to have the idea of such a phylum to guide the investigation, an idea that only reason can supply and do so a priori.

This reflection on the intricate relation between the physical-mechanical and teleological grounds of explanation can be seen as a preparatory exercise for Kant's most detailed and best-known treatment of teleology in the third *Critique*. As we shall see in next section, it is in this *Critique* that Kant thoroughly explicates and defends the view I outlined in the preceding two paragraphs, as well as his overall position about the role of reason in guiding the work of the *Naturforscher*. In a way, the rationalist methodological moves that he made in his 1785 and 1788 essays—in response to challenges from empiricist naturalists like Zimmermann and Forster—mediated the development of his view about the role of reason in the study of nature between the first *Critique* (1781/87) and the third *Critique* (1790). To that extent, the development of Kant's critical philosophy of nature and of scientific knowledge is intertwined with the theoretical work on race he did from the standpoint of a *Naturforscher*.[46] I will wait until the concluding section to comment on what this may say about the impact of Kant's raciology on what scholars now see as the representative parts of his pure theoretical philosophy. For now,

[46] A similar point is made in Cooper 2017; Sandford 2018; Mateo and Stubenrauch 2022. It is also worth adding that Christoph Girtanner's *Über das Kantische Prinzip für die Naturgeschichte* (1796), which Kant recommends as an authoritative rendering of his theory of race in the *Anthropology* (1798; Anth, 7: 320), is a synthesis of his race essays and the third *Critique*. I already mentioned this fact in Chapter 1. In section 3.7, I will refer to some of the relevant passages in Girtanner's treatise that correspond to the third *Critique*.

I turn to the third *Critique*. I shall focus on the parts that would help Kant to clarify and solidify the core claims of his race theory.

## 3.7. A Teleological-Mechanical Mode of Explanation: How the Third *Critique* Solidifies Kant's Race Theory

The part of the third *Critique* relevant here is the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment." It revolves around an antinomy of mechanism and teleology or what is known as the "antinomy of teleological judgment." I will analyze Kant's treatment of this antinomy in a way that resonates with my preceding analysis of his earlier attempts to address the conflict between different accounts of human variations both in the first *Critique* and in his 1785 and 1788 essays on race.[47]

Kant begins by distinguishing two versions of the antinomy in question. First, there is an apparent conflict between two "maxims" or subjective principles of the *reflecting* power of judgment:

> *Thesis*: All generation [*Erzeugung*] of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.
>
> *Antithesis*: Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely that of final causes). (KU, 5: 387)

Second, if these "regulative principles for research" were taken as "constitutive principles of the possibility of the objects themselves," then we have an antinomy between two objective principles of the *determining* power of judgment:

> *Thesis*: All generation of material things is possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.
>
> *Antithesis*: Some generation of such things is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws. (5: 387)

[47] There are interpretive controversies surrounding the antinomy, especially regarding its relation to Kant's account of nature and scientific knowledge in the first *Critique*. I will set aside such controversies. For a few relevant analyses of the antinomy, see Cohen 2004; Breitenbach 2008; Watkins 2009; Allison 2012: 201–14; Goy 2014; Geiger 2022: 83–97.

We cannot prove either of these objective principles, Kant argues. By contrast, we can consistently hold both of the subjective maxims for *judging* the possibility of the generation of natural products.

By the first maxim, "I *should* always *reflect* on them *in accordance with the principle* of the mere mechanism of nature, and hence research the latter, so far as I can"; for otherwise there would be no "proper cognition of nature." If the second maxim dictates that I search for and reflect on "the principle of final causes . . . in the case of some forms of nature," reflection by the first maxim is "not thereby suspended" (KU, 5: 587–88). The point of the second maxim is not that those forms, objectively speaking, are impossible in accordance with merely mechanical laws. It is only that "*human reason*, in the pursuit of this [merely mechanistic] reflection and in this manner, can never discover the least basis for what is specific in a natural end." Therefore,

> the power of judgment, as a *reflecting* (on a subjective ground) rather than as a determining (according to an objective principle of the possibility of things in themselves) power of judgment, is forced to think of another principle than that of the mechanism of nature as the ground of the possibility of certain forms in nature. (5: 588)[48]

Kant then develops this account of the teleological power of judgment in a way that makes sense of his emphasis on the limits of "human reason." I shall highlight the parts of his arguments that would reassure him that the theory of human variations that he developed in his race essays is the only philosophically sound option in comparison with the competing theories.

Kant begins by problematizing the existing "systems for the explanation of nature with regard to final causes," which "all controvert one another dogmatically, i.e., concerning objective principles of the possibility of things" (KU, 5: 391). He divides these systems into *idealism*, which denies that the purposiveness of nature is caused by an end, and *realism*, which holds that some purposiveness in nature (in organized beings) is intentional or has a final cause. Idealism takes two forms. One is Epicureanism. It explains everything by "blind chance," which in Kant view explains nothing (5: 393). The other is Spinozism. It treats all forms of nature as accidents inhering in a

[48] Kant's view on the relation between the "determining" and "reflecting" powers of judgment is complex and subject to different interpretations. See Dunn 2021, a recent interpretation that critically engages with previous interpretations.

single original being, namely in God as the sole substance. This system, Kant grants, "secures for the natural forms the unity of the ground . . . requisite for all purposiveness." The problem, however, is that it also "removes their contingency, without which no *unity of purpose* can be thought."[49] It cannot accomplish its explanatory aim, then, because "ontological unity is not immediately a *unity of end*, and in no way makes the latter comprehensible" (5: 393–94; see 5: 421).

Realism also comes in two varieties. First, hylozism, which views all matter as alive, bases those ends "on the analogue of a faculty acting in accordance with an intention, the *life of matter* (in it, or also through an animating inner principle, a world-soul)." Second, theism "derives them from the original ground of the world-whole, as an intentionally productive (originally living) intelligent being" (KU, 5: 392). Echoing his theory of hypothesis (as I outlined it in section 3.4), Kant rejects these realist systems for their inability to ascertain the *possibility* of the supposed grounds of explanation (5: 594–95).

The remaining option, Kant continues, is to treat the concept of intentional ends in nature *merely critically*, as a "principle of reason for the reflecting power of judgment" (KU, 5: 397).[50] Due to "the peculiar constitution of [our] cognitive faculties," he explains, we must "subject nature to the concept of an intention if we would even merely conduct research among its organized products by means of continued observation." In this way, "we do not actually *observe* ends in nature as intentional, but merely *add* this concept as a guideline for the power of judgment in reflection on the products of nature." The concept therefore rests "only on subjective conditions" of *our* cognition, serving merely as a "necessary maxim for the use of our reason in experience" (5: 397–99). That is, to understand the possibility of certain natural products, *we* must consider them as intentionally generated ends. In so doing, we neither demand "that there actually is a particular cause that has the representation of an end as its determining ground" nor deny "that another (higher) understanding than the human one might be able to find the

[49] The reference to contingency is also important here. As I mentioned in section 3.2, Kant thinks that the main philosophical challenge posed by the phenomenon of hereditary skin color is to figure out "what brings it about that something which does not belong to the essence of the species can be hereditary" (BBM, 8: 96). And he recognized early on the difficulty of explaining "How the skin is able to acquire so accidental a thing as colour" (PG, 9: 314; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 91).

[50] It is important for Kant's argument that the principle of reason here is "not a principle . . . for the understanding," which seeks to determine the objects of experience, "but for the [merely reflecting] power of judgment" (KU, 5: 405).

ground of the possibility of such products of nature even in the mechanism of nature" (5: 405–6).

Having thus established the teleology of nature as a critical principle of reason for the reflecting power of judgment (see Girtanner 1796: 27–29), Kant then explains why it must be united with "the principle of the universal mechanism of matter." It is important, he argues, "not [to] allow the mechanism of nature in its productions to drop out of sight and be bypassed in its explanations" (KU, 5: 410–11)—albeit only if the mechanism is "subordinated to an intentionally acting cause" (5: 422). This emphasis on the need to unify the mechanical and teleological principles in the investigation of organic formation gives Kant the basis for assessing competing teleological accounts. The account that wins out is basically the same as the theory that he labored on and refined over the course of three race essays.

Kant starts by distinguishing "occasionalism" and "prestabilism." Occasionalism holds that "the supreme world-cause, in accordance with its idea, would immediately provide the organic formation to the matter commingling in every impregnation." Kant dismisses this system as unphilosophical, wherein "everything that is natural is entirely lost, and with that is also lost all use of reason for judging the possibility of such a product." According to prestabilism, by contrast, "the supreme world-cause . . . would only have placed in the initial products of its wisdom the predisposition by means of which an organic being produces more of its kind and constantly preserves the species itself" (KU, 5: 422).

Prestabilism, in turn, has two varieties. One is the theory of evolution or system of *individual preformation*. Unlike occasionalism, this theory avoids "complete hyperphysics, which could dispense with all natural explanation." Still, it is attached to hyperphysics, finding purposiveness even in cases—in miscarriages for example—that "one cannot possibly hold to be ends of nature." It also cannot account for important phenomena such as the "generation of half-breeds" (KU, 5: 423–24), a notion that is central to Kant's theory of race (I will say more about this in Chapter 4).

The other variety of prestabilism is the theory of involution or "epigenesis." This is a system of *generic preformation*: "the productive capacity of the progenitor is still preformed in accordance with the internally purposive predispositions," but these predispositions are assumed as being imparted to an entire "stock [*Stamme*]," not to individuals (KU, 5: 423). This minimizes the appeal to the supernatural, which makes the theory of epigenesis preferable in Kant's view. Even without any advantage in terms of the "experiential

grounds" for this theory, he argues, "reason would still already be favorably disposed" to its mode of explanation (*Erklärungsart*). It represents natural products as "possible only in accordance with the causality of ends," but "leaves everything that follows from the first beginning to nature (without, however, determining anything about this first beginning, on which physics always founders, no matter what chain of causes it tries)" (5: 424). In sum, the appeal of the theory of epigenesis is that it "leaves natural mechanism an indeterminable but at the same time also unmistakable role" to play in subordination to the in-itself "inscrutable *principle* of an original organization" (5: 424; see Girtanner 1796: 19–24).[51]

This defense of the theory of epigenesis consummates decades of philosophical reflections about organic formation on Kant's part. He was already gesturing toward it in the "Only Possible Argument" of 1763. As I noted in section 3.3, he proposed then that we can comprehend the possibility of organic products only by presupposing a supernatural origin. This origin can in turn take two forms: either each organic formation comes from an immediate divine action, or an initial divine action gave organisms a suitability to generate (*erzeugen*) their kind. Kant preferred the latter view, for the reason that it still grants natural beings the ability to produce (*hervorbringen*) their effects in accordance with universal laws (BDG, 2: 115). The imperative to leave the greatest possible room for law-governed *natural* production of organisms remained constant in Kant's subsequent attempts to identify a mode of explanation (*Erklärungsart*) that meets the demands of reason in its empirical use and provides the best possible explanation for such phenomena as variations within a single species. In short, he sought an explanation that

[51] Kant is referring to Blumenbach in this passage, who in his view has done more than anyone else for the proof and proper application of the theory of epigenesis. The limiting role played by the "inscrutable *principle* of an original *organization*" is the reason, Kant claims, why Blumenbach "calls the faculty in the matter in an organized body . . . a *formative drive* [*Bildungstrieb*] (standing, as it were, under the guidance and direction of that former principle)" (KU, 5: 424). The parenthetical phrase that qualifies *Bildungstrieb* is particularly important to Kant, but it also signifies an element that was not salient in Blumenbach's own account (Richards 2000; Zammito 2012). Whereas Blumenbach was unequivocally opposed to preformation, Kant has sought to retain some elements thereof: *Bildungstrieb* (as Kant presents it) is not an unlimited self-forming power; rather, it operates under the pre-established, though in itself inscrutable, *constraint* of an original formation. This generic preformation, as Kant suggested a few years earlier (1785), comes down to the germs and natural predispositions contained in the original phylum of a given species; thus, there is a natural limit to the number and degree of differences that can develop within the species (RezHerder, 8: 62–63). This qualification is what allows Kant to claim that only a certain number of principal races can be "established with certainty" (BBM, 8: 94). This is not a claim that Blumenbach, a committed empiricist, would make. For some well-contextualized and nuanced accounts of the relation between Kant's and Blumenbach's views, see Sloan 1979: 129–45; Bernasconi 2006; Helbig and Nassar 2016; Mensch 2018; Gambarotto 2018: 10–26.

would be "exactly in keeping with the use of reason in natural science" (BBM, 8: 96). He found it in "epigenesis," as he came to understand the term.[52]

Although Kant never explicitly mentions epigenesis in his writings on race, it is present as a system of generic preformation in all of them. In the 1775/77 essay, examining the phenomenon that, in the migration and transplanting of animals and plants, nature produces contingent but heritable "variations and races of the same species," Kant argues that we must consider such productions as "preformed [*vorgebildet*]" (VRM, 2: 434). That is, "a particular germ or natural predisposition for [each production] was to be found in the organic creature." His reasoning goes as follows: physical-mechanical causes such as air and sun "can well be occasioning causes but not producing [*hervorbringende*] ones" when it comes to hereditary characteristics. Such causes are incapable of adding anything to the "generative power" of an organic being, that is, to "bring about something that propagates itself, if it concerns a special shape or relation of the parts" (2: 235). Since reason can easily rule out other explanations such as chance and immediate divine action (as I explained in section 3.2), there is only one good alternative left:

> what is supposed to propagate itself must have laid previously in the generative power as antecedently determined to an occasional unfolding in accordance with the circumstances in which the creature can find itself and in which it is supposed to persistently preserve itself. (2: 435)

In so many words, there is a *generic preformation* imparted to the entire stock of an animal or plant species, which consists in certain germs and natural predispositions. In this way, nature "equip[s] her creature through hidden inner provisions for all kinds of future circumstances" (2: 434).

[52] The epigenetic theory of generation evolved over time and was much debated before and during Kant's philosophical career. This may explain why he waited until 1790 to argue publicly for a significantly modified version thereof, which might seem alien to many of the previous supporters and opponents of epigenesis alike (a similar explanation is given in Reill 2005: 161). For a range of contextualized analyses of Kant's evolving attitude toward epigenesis, see Zammito 2007; Mensch 2013; Goy 2014; Helbig and Nassar 2016; Zammito 2016 (a critical literature review); Demarest 2017. See Cohen 2006 for a particularly helpful exposition of Kant's theory of epigenesis in connection with his monogenism, the combination of which then serves as the condition of his anthropology. In the background is an exceedingly influential debate between Albrecht von Haller (1708–77) and Caspar Friedrich Wolff (1734–94) over the preformationist and epigenetic theories of generation. For accounts of this debate that can help to shed further light on Kant's views about the relation between preformation and epigenesis, see Roe 1981; Detlefsen 2006; Dupont 2007; Gambarotto 2018: 1–14; Zammito 2018: 122–71. The debate is explicitly brought to bear on the Kantian theory of race in Girtanner 1796: 20–23.

As to *how* those original germs and predispositions would unfold in various material conditions, especially climate, Kant leaves this entirely to natural mechanisms in accordance with certain then-known laws of nature. In particular, as I mentioned in section 3.5, he relies on a chemical theory that assumes phlogiston and (acidic and alkaline) salts as the basic agents to explain how the human skin took on different colors in different "races," colors that have become hereditary (that is, have been incorporated into the generative power of each race). Such is how the "Negro race," for example, was supposedly formed in a hot and humid climate:

> The abundance of iron particles, which otherwise are found in all human blood and which here are precipitated in the reticular substance through the evaporation of the phosphorous acid (of which all Negroes stink), causes the black color showing through the upper thin skin; and the heavy iron content in the blood appears also to be necessary for preventing the enervation of all parts. . . . this results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate. (VRM, 2: 438; see BBM, 8: 103; GTP, 8: 169–70n; V-PG/Bergk, 26.2: 1108–9)[53]

This account shows how, in the case of organic products, nature's work in accordance with mechanical laws is subordinated to a teleological ground as *means* to an end, as Kant would later put it in the third *Critique* (KU, 5: 414). In other words, it would not be enough to say that the possibility for the human skin to develop a particular color, which is a merely contingent property with respect to the human species, can only be understood on the presupposition of an intentionally acting cause. One must in addition show how the color may be *produced naturally*, in accordance with known (knowable) laws of nature. Even though one can only get a more or less probable hypothesis in this regard, hypothesize one must: otherwise, one would have no *understanding* of the phenomenon at all.

In sum, Kant's account of teleology in the third *Critique*—with an emphasis on the need to unify the teleological and mechanical principles of explanation—helps to solidify his race theory by reaffirming its philosophical underpinnings (though in different terms). Above all, it further clarifies the status of the assumption of certain original germs and predispositions as the preformed ground in an organic species for its adaptive developments in

[53] See Gorkom 2020a on the role of phlogiston in Kant's theory of race.

different climates: the assumption is not a physical hypothesis—nor a dogmatic metaphysical claim—about how things are constituted objectively speaking, but a subjective principle of reason for judging about the possibility of such natural phenomena as hereditary human differences. In this way Kant can say, against someone like Zimmermann, that the validity of that assumption does not hinge on how much direct experiential support it has on its side. Rather, its strength lies in its ability to guide the *Naturforscher* to investigate natural productions in a manner that satisfies his core philosophical and methodological commitments (as I outlined them in section 3.3). In the meantime, by emphasizing the need to leave as great an explanatory role as possible for law-governed natural mechanisms and the demand to prove the real possibility of anything that is asserted to be part of the objective constitution of nature, Kant can rule out, a priori, any appeal to special divine creations (VRM, 2: 440) or to some "basic [natural] power" (GTP, 8: 182) to account for human differences. All that is left standing is his own system of epigenesis, which combines the assumption of a generic preformation with mechanical specifications to explain how the same human species can be developed into so many varieties and races under different material conditions.

## 3.8. Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the fact that Kant, in all three of his race essays (1775/77, 1785, and 1788), theorizes about race from the standpoint of a *Naturforscher* (section 3.2). From the very start of his career, Kant was deeply interested in natural phenomena that he deemed important to humanity. These phenomena ranged from earthquakes to the fact that humanity is an earthbound animal species, the development of whose rational faculties seems to depend on certain material conditions of embodiment. Given his Newtonianism, Kant the *Naturforscher* was committed to explaining all natural phenomena in terms of law-governed natural (as opposed to supernatural) causes. The (re)generation of organic beings, including the emergence of hereditary human differences, posed a unique challenge to this commitment (section 3.3).

Kant responded to the challenge in a characteristically methodic way, particularly when he had to defend his explanation against the competing ones. In the context of his race essays, the chief explanandum is the supposedly

persistent heredity of skin color. Kant's explanation combines two kinds of causal grounds. One is a purposive cause that consists in certain original germs and natural predispositions, which allowed the ancient humanity to preserve itself in any climate. The other is an efficient cause that comes down to the different climatic conditions under which those original germs and predispositions would develop into various hereditary characteristics—provided the early humans resided in their respective climates for long periods of time—in accordance with certain known or knowable laws of nature. From Kant's perspective, this teleological-mechanical mode of explanation is preferable not because it has greater evidential support than the alternatives, but because it better satisfies certain demands that *reason* imposes on the investigation of nature. This rationalist approach is reflected both in Kant's theory of hypothesis (section 3.4) and in his account of how reason licenses and even demands the use of teleological principles in the investigation of organic products (sections 3.6 and 3.7). It sets Kant's account of human variations far apart from the empiricist approach championed by critics like Zimmermann (section 3.5).

Overall, the theory of race Kant developed in three essays is intertwined with his lifelong work in natural philosophy, especially his account of nature (as a systematic unity) and theory of scientific inquiry in the first *Critique* and third *Critique*. As Stella Sandford puts it, "in crucial respects there can be no historical and programmatic separation between [Kant's *Rassenschriften*] and the broader development of . . . his critical philosophy." To show that the former is integral to the latter is not, Sandford clarifies, to reveal any sort of "crypto-racism in or crypto-racialisation of the critical philosophy." It is rather to shed light on the fact that Kant's theory of race is in some respect crucial to the development of important aspects of his critical philosophy (the influence can go the other way, too). His treatment of teleological judgment in the third *Critique*, in particular, can be seen as a response to the methodological and philosophical problems that became most salient in his race essays, which contain "the first developed model of the use of teleological judgment" in his work (2018: 951–52). In other words, just as Kant practiced a method of hypothesis before he made a concerted effort to theorize about it (section 3.4), so did he practice in his race essays what he would theorize deeply about in the third *Critique* (section 3.7).

I agree that this "does not mean that the relevant aspects of the critical philosophy are racialised or that the concept of 'race' is hiding" in the first or the third *Critique* (Sandford 2018: 971). The situation will become more

complicated, however, when we recognize that teleology is also pivotal to the development of the racist aspect of Kant's raciology. I will talk more about this in Chapter 4. For now, let me briefly return to an observation I made in section 3.2. In Kant's view, I noted, passing judgments about things always carries the risk of error. Generally, one should accept this risk, lest one remain ignorant about many things that are within one's cognitive reach. Kant draws an important distinction between merely speculative (theoretical) cognitions and practical ones, however, in terms of what is *at stake* in each case: while one should dare to err in the former case, one would be wise to judge little—or judge with extreme caution—about matters which have such high practical stakes that even the smallest error could be dangerous.[54]

It is not always clear whether a given case falls in the high-stakes category. I have structured this entire chapter around Kant's claim that he is theorizing about race from the standpoint of a *Naturforscher* with certain philosophical and methodological commitments. In this assumed position, he studies human beings qua members of the animal kingdom and intends his concept of race to be applicable to animals in general. This concept, he claims, "is well grounded in the reason of each observer of nature who infers from a hereditary particularity of different interbreeding animals . . . a cause that lies originally in the phylum of the species" (GTP, 8: 163; see BBM, 8: 99–100). Accordingly, one talks about "races" of *birds*, *horses*, and so on as well as "races" of humans, as though it makes no practical difference whether one classifies humans similarly as one does nonhuman animals.

Of course, we now know that the racial division of humans can be hugely consequential, in a way that classifications of nonhuman animals cannot be. Regardless of what the speculative *Naturforscher* thought, the racial division he made of humans—especially one that ascribes persistently hereditary characteristics to the races—can be used by one of the races to oppress another or to justify and further entrench existing oppressions. Was Kant so single-mindedly bent on studying the differences among humans qua animals from the perspective of a mere *Naturforscher* that he was blinded to this possibility? To put it another way, was he simply too naïve to imagine the

[54] Kant also draws a distinction between theoretical and practical *uses* of any given cognition. A theoretical cognition, he teaches, can be "practical *in potentia*" or "of practical importance, from which rules for our conduct can be derived." In fact, *all* cognitions somehow look "toward the practical, although one cannot have insight into this right away." That is, "the final end of all our cognitions seems to rest on the fact that they ought to contain a rule about what agrees with our highest ends," and in this agreement lies the "value," "worth," or "dignity" of any of our cognitions; otherwise, it would be "merely speculative" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 901–3).

practical implications of what seems to be a purely theoretical investigation of race as a biological category?

We are in no position to answer such questions definitively. Nonetheless, I find it important to reflect on an observation I made in section 3.2. When Georg Forster challenged Kant to consider what his monogenism, according to which all races belong to the same species, might say about the cruel practices of "Negro" slavery symbolized by the slave driver's raised whip, Kant's response was to avoid this morally charged question altogether. Instead, he doubled down on the *Naturforscher*'s purely theoretical standpoint. Worse still, in an attempt to answer Forster's argument from the possibility of "second transplanting," which Kant admitted was "the most important counterargument" to his theory (GTP, 8: 172),[55] he would invoke an anti-abolitionist's testimony about the behaviors of freed "Negroes"—just to make the point that a climatically induced trait could be incorporated into the generative power of a people and persist in other climates (8: 174n). This move on Kant's part should make anyone pause who is tempted by the idea that a monogenetic view of human races, which Kant defended with the best tools his critical philosophy could afford, is better suited than a polygenetic one, which Forster entertained, for grounding claims of equal treatment of all races. Kant adhered to monogenism primarily, or even exclusively, because he saw it as the better framework for *explaining* the persistent heredity of purported racial *differences* (BBM, 8: 98–99).

We will resume this reflection in Chapter 4. Among other things, we will see that the kind of monogenism that natural philosophers like Kant endorsed—given the historical context in which it took shape—could hardly be a compassionate alternative to polygenism. If anything, by folding all humans into a *single history* and doing so from a Eurocentric viewpoint, Kant's scientific monogenism could have particularly insidious implications in a world where racial hegemony was already a reality even if it was yet to be conceptualized

[55] Forster's argument goes roughly as follows: it takes an indeterminably long time for a skin color to form under the influence of a climate; thus, one cannot conclude definitively that it will not evolve, through *imperceptibly small changes* and over another *indeterminably long* period of time, into a different color in a new climate (2013: 151–53). More generally, if one assumes that the first human beings developed a particular trait after a prolonged acclimation in one environment thanks to the wisdom of nature, one should also be able, on account of that same wisdom, to "foresee the event of a second transplanting" that would engender a "new alteration" of the trait in another climate. There is neither a priori reason nor definitive empirical evidence against this possibility (2013: 162). This counterargument is serious in that it threatens to undermine Kant's explanandum, the alleged phenomenon that skin color—or any other purported *racial* characteristic—is persistently, irreversibly hereditary across climates.

as such. We will also see that Kant's monogenism, especially as he refined it in his 1785 and 1788 essays, could in fact give him cause to feel *ambivalent* about—if not straightforwardly supportive of—race-based chattel slavery. That is, his silence about the morality of chattel slavery in the 1780s, even with Forster's prodding, might not simply be an armchair philosopher's blindness to or willful ignorance of real-world injustices. Rather, he might well see it as a transitional phase in humanity's lengthy journey toward its *species*-bound destiny, a journey in which only the Occidental whites can participate as agents.

# 4

# From Baconian Natural History to Kant's Racialization of Human Differences

## A Study of Philosophizing from Locations of Power

### 4.1. Introduction

Kant's theory of race builds on two types of materials. One consists in travel reports by people who he takes to be credible witnesses. The other includes works by fellow philosophers who theorized about human differences. Kant relates differently to those sources. His account of the relation between historical and rational cognitions helps to explain why. I will outline the account as a way to introduce the themes of this chapter.

Kant distinguishes historical and rational cognitions in two ways. *Subjectively* speaking, I cognize something historically if I hold it to be true simply because someone has told me so; my cognition is rational if I have drawn it "from principles of reason" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 830). *Objectively*, a cognition is historical if it is possible only by means of sensory experiences (either one's own or others')—as in history and geography; it is rational if it is possible only as a "cognition *ex principiis*, which has been drawn from grounds *a priori*"—as in philosophy and mathematics. A cognition that is objectively rational may nevertheless be subjectively historical. Kant deems this harmful in philosophy (24: 797). For then one would not be learning how to philosophize, but merely imitating others out of intellectual "laziness" (24: 866).[1]

Lacking either historical or rational cognition in the objective sense amounts to ignorance. Lacking historical cognition is *material* ignorance—when, for example, one does not know the existence of something. By contrast, one is *formally* ignorant for not understanding the "grounds" of a thing—either what

[1] For different versions of Kant's distinction between historical and rational cognitions, also see A836–37/B864–65; Log, 9: 22, 25; V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 52–53, 99–100; V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 697, 704, 733.

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they are or how the thing in question follows from them (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 66). Kant stresses the importance of extending one's cognitive reach on both fronts. Historical cognition in the objective sense provides the material foundation for rational cognition (24: 49). In particular, we need to acquire historical cognition through other people's testimony because our own experience is spatiotemporally limited.[2] In fact, we rely so much on testimony that Kant thinks it offends the entirety of mankind and violates "the right of humanity" if someone "publishes a false report" (V-Mo/Collins, 27: 447–48).[3]

It is not enough to accumulate historical knowledge, though. One who possesses "*gigantic* erudition" may be like a Cyclops missing "the eye of true philosophy, by means of which reason suitably uses this mass of historical knowledge" (Anth, 7: 227). What philosophy, as "the second eye," allows one to see is "how all the cognitions of the one eye agree with reference to a common end" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 818). From Kant's perspective, we need this eye even as we gather empirical information, insofar as we want our knowledge to be a "system."

> Contact with people and travel broaden all our knowledge. . . . if we are prepared in advance by [appropriate] instruction, then we have a conceptual whole [*ein Ganzes, einen Inbegriff von Kenntnissen*] by means of which we can learn about people. We are then in a position to allocate to every experience its class and its place within the whole. (PG, 9: 158; see Anth, 7: 120; V-PG/Messina, 26.2: 622)

The *Inbegriff* that one needs in advance is a certain "architectonic concept," in reference to which one may then gather empirical data methodically—so as to facilitate the "understanding of connections," which is a form of rational cognition (PG, 9: 158). In other words, "if, in striving to expand his cognitions, one does not look to their connection, then extensive knowledge [*Vielwisse*] amounts to nothing more than a mere *rhapsody*." What one should do instead, Kant advises, is follow the guidance of an "architectonic, which is a system in accordance with ideas" and thereby extend one's cognitions according to "a well ordered and purposive plan" (Log, 9: 48–49).

[2] PG, 9: 159; Log, 9: 77–78; V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 245; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 870. I discuss Kant's theory of testimony in greater detail in Lu-Adler 2022a.

[3] Kant often uses the case of testimony to illustrate the duty of truth telling (RGV, 6: 4; V-Met/Vigil, 29: 1018; V-Mo/Vigil, 27: 487, 491, 506–7, 605).

This account of the relation between historical and rational cognitions helps to illuminate the complicated processes through which eighteenth-century thinkers like Kant came to divide the entirety of humanity into different varieties or races and investigate their differences as a subject of natural philosophy. Roughly corresponding to the distinction between objectively historical and rational cognitions, there is a distinction between *data production* and (scientific) *knowledge production*, which are distinct albeit interdependent processes.[4] I will use this distinction to give a brief overview of the background conditions under which Kant's raciology took shape.

First, there was an intentional global data gathering that started in the seventeenth century under the influence of Francis Bacon's (1561–1626) ambitious project called "Instauratio Magna" or "Great Instauration."[5] Europe's expansion of global trading and colonizing activities opened up a radically new horizon to natural philosophers.[6] It was now possible to study the "book of nature" in never-before-visited regions of the world.[7] This possibility inspired Bacon—and, following the Baconian blueprint, the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge (founded in 1660)—to promote a deliberate, methodically guided global data gathering through a growing network of European agents and merchants overseas. This would lead to an explosion of data about other parts of the world. The Baconian ambition was to compile a comprehensive "natural history" on the foundation of which true philosophical knowledge could be advanced (this anticipates Kant's distinction between objectively historical and rational cognitions). The frontispiece of Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* (1620) aptly captures this ambition (see Figure 4.1). Note the Latin motto inscribed between the two pillars: *Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia* (Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased).[8] It is a

[4] See Baker and Mayernik 2020 for a modern version of this distinction.

[5] For the Latin original (with facing page translation) of Bacon's plan for the Instauratio Magna, see Bacon 2004: 2–47. An English translation ("The Great Renewal") is also available in Bacon 2000: 1–24. Kant would use one of Bacon's statements as the epigraph for the second (1787) edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Bii).

[6] For the sake of argument, I will treat Europe as a block for now. Sometimes, as we shall see in section 4.5.2, it is also important to consider intra-European power struggles.

[7] On the history of the metaphor "book of nature," see Tanzella-Nitti 2019. On the use of this metaphor by the Renaissance and early modern natural philosophers, see Bono 1995; Harrison 2006.

[8] Bacon's frontispiece is strikingly similar to that of *Regimiento de Navegación* (1606), a Spanish navigation manual. In the latter case, the Latin motto inscribed between the Pillars of Hercules is *plus ultra* (further beyond), which reverses the ancient command *ne/non plus ultra* to represent Spain's newfound imperial ambition. For contextualized analyses of the symbolic meanings of Bacon's frontispiece, its connection to the Spanish one, and what this may tell us about Bacon's indebtedness to the oft-neglected or underestimated contributions by the Iberian empires (Spain and Portugal) to early modern science, see Hutton 2002: 52–55; Gascoigne 2012.

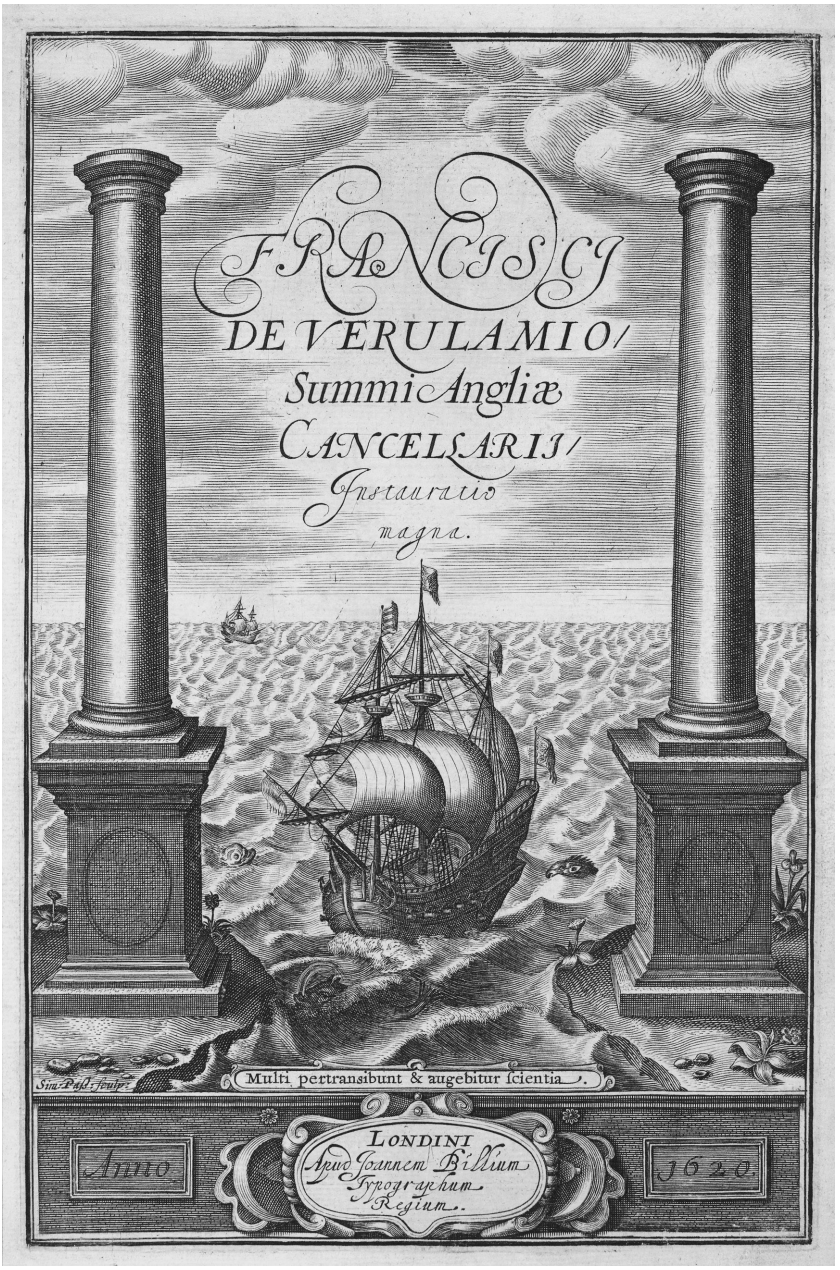



**Figure 4.1.** The frontispiece of *Instauratio Magna* (1620). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

biblical phrase from Daniel 12:4, which begins by asking Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book." This reflects the methodological shift represented by Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620, part of the *Instauratio Magna*), from decoding the written words by past authors to a true "interpretation of nature" (to be explained in section 4.2.1). The Pillars of Hercules and the ship heading toward the open sea in full sail symbolize Bacon's vision of how to materialize this new interpretative project. The project required cooperation from many players. Much of the rudimentary fieldwork, in particular, would have to be done through the growing global network that England established through its trading posts and settlements overseas.

The Baconian approach to data production is systematic and philosophically orientated. As we shall see in section 4.2.1, Bacon provided specific instructions, together with an assortment of topics, to the agents and merchants who would collect materials for the making of a comprehensive natural history, including a natural history of mankind. As fellows of the Royal Society—especially Robert Boyle (1627–91)—inherited this role of guiding the global data gathering, they would additionally make *skin color* a salient topic in a way that Bacon never did (section 4.2.2).

Meanwhile, no amount of data about human beings inhabiting other parts of the world, however methodically they were collected, could on their own lead to a modern theory of race, whereby purported human differences would be biologized and systematically investigated as a scientific issue. For the modern racialization of humanity to get off the ground, there must also be some kind of *paradigm shift* in the Western philosophical outlook:[9] it would take a radically new way of conceptualizing human beings and understanding their differences from, as well as relations to, one another.[10]

[9] A *paradigm* in the history of science, as Thomas Kuhn describes it, is an "actual scientific practice" that provides a model "from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research" (1970: 10). A paradigm *shift* requires, as part of its necessary conditions, both "incremental data" (1970: 89) and a radically new way of looking at the world by a group of practitioners. The transition to the latter, moreover, "cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience"; rather, like "gestalt switch, it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all" (1970: 150). While I am using this basic Kuhnian conception of a paradigm shift, I do not mean to follow Kuhn's account to the letter. Nor do I rule out other ways of explaining the historical emergence of modern raciology. It is possible, for instance, to give an explanation that revolves around the mind-body problem. For this, see Harfouch 2018, which in turn builds on Eric Voegelin's (1933a, 1933b) study of the history of racial concepts (as well as practices) and of philosophers' (including Kant's) entanglements in it.

[10] I am talking about the "Western" philosophical outlook without assuming that there is a homogeneous philosophical tradition in the West, although it is fair to say that much of what we now associate with "Western" philosophy is shaped by the teachings of canonized figures like Kant (I will discuss this problem in Chapter 6). My point is rather to contrast the canonical Western worldview with non-Western ones, such as Confucian, Buddhist, and various indigenous worldviews. I thereby

To illustrate, consider a case that apparently had the opportunity but failed to initiate such a conceptual shift: François Bernier's (1620–88) division of four human "races" in an anonymously published short article, "Nouvelle Division de la Terre" (1684).[11] In the history of the idea of race, Bernier's "racial geography" is commonly seen as original and groundbreaking.[12] Paul Taylor presents it as one of the "watershed moments" in classical racialism (2022: 35). It hardly deserves this designation, though. Bernier ostensibly lacks a consistent criterion for his division.[13] Nor is it clear what he means by 'race,' a term that he treats as interchangeable with 'species.'[14] And the second half of the "Nouvelle Division" is mostly an exoticizing account of female beauty in other parts of the world. Thus, the article appears to be simply "a *pièce d'occasion* driven by personal observations (including a keen interest in female beauty) rather than theoretical debates" (Rubiés 2013: 77). Unsurprisingly, for all his reputation as a "philosophical traveler" best known for his books on the Mughal India (Stuurman 2000: 7–8; Burke

leave room for the possibility that the Western racialist and racist thinking as we now know it is so *singular* that one cannot simply transpose it onto any other cultures. For a comparative study of Chinese cosmopolitanism that foregrounds this point, see Xiang 2022.

[11] How Bernier opens this article is instructive. "Geographers up to this time have only divided the earth according to its different countries or regions," he states, whereas he will use a division of "four or five species or races of men . . . as the foundation for a new division of the earth" (2000: 1–2). The European geographic representations of the world (mostly in maps) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were practically oriented. They were, for instance, often tied with seaward ambitions and the need for territorial managements (Lestringant 1994; Pelletier 1998; Fernández-Armesto 2007).

[12] Hannaford 1996: 191; Stuurman 2000; Vartija 2021: 607–8. The term 'racial geography' is from Justin Smith's analysis of Bernier's racial classification (2015: 143–49).

[13] Bernier's first race includes not only most Europeans but also some Asians, North Africans, and (with less certainty) "the Americans." He provides no account of the physical traits that may unite all those populations. The second race consists of sub-Saharan Africans (with some exceptions), whose characteristics include the blackness "peculiar to them," "thick lips and squab noses," texture of skin, scanty beard, wooly hair, and so on. The third and fourth races are marked by a whole other set of physical traits. The populations included in the third race, such as those found in China and Japan, are said to be "truly white" but are classified as a separate race on account of having a "flat face" and "little pig's-eyes long and deep set." Bernier reserves the fourth race for the "Lapps"—a derogative reference to the Sámi people—only because he finds them singularly "ugly" and "wretched." His judgment about this people is reportedly based on his personal encounter with "two of them," some "pictures" he has seen, and what he has heard about them from others (2000: 2–3). Voltaire would later mock this kind of approach: "If a Hindu Bernier had come to Paris or to Rome and heard a professor of the Propaganda Fide, or of the college des Cholets, and if he formed his judgements on us based on these two animals, would he not rake us for madmen and imbeciles?" (cited and translated in Dew 2009: 166).

[14] The problem is not just that Bernier failed to be conceptually innovative regarding "race." In fact, as we shall see in sections 4.3 and 4.4, nor will Linnaeus or Buffon add any incontrovertibly modern inflection to this concept. For a comparative semantic analysis of "race" as it applies to Bernier, Linnaeus, and Buffon, respectively, see Hoquet 2014. For the view that Bernier's concept of race is "modern" insofar as it focuses on fixed and heritable physical traits, see Boulle 2003: 12–16.

1999),[15] Bernier's racial division did not seem to get much traction at all—at least not among philosophers.[16]

To me, it is precisely "the lack of consequence" of Bernier's division that makes it interesting (Douglas 2005: 338). Philosophically speaking, its negligibility is rooted in its failure to offer a *systematic* and *methodic* taxonomy of all things natural, in which to *embed* a division of humanity. The first such taxonomy appeared with the *Systema Naturae* (first edition in 1735) by Carl Linnaeus (1707–78). Linnaeus made the pathbreaking move to present the human being as part of the animal kingdom, one of the three kingdoms of nature, and hence as an organic product of nature. The Linnaean classification of four human varieties—(red) Americans, (white) Europeans, (yellow) Asians, and (black) Africans—was therefore embedded in a systematic taxonomy of the entirety of nature (section 4.3).

The Linnaean taxonomy paved the way for a study of human differences that accorded with the Newtonian model of science:[17] natural philosophers—or Kant's so-called *Naturforschern*, as we encountered in Chapter 3—would seek to explain human variations in terms of the same natural laws and mechanisms that are applicable to animals in general. Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–88), for all his disagreements with Linnaeus, would be the first to pursue such an explanation in a systematic way (section 4.4). Buffon accomplished this with his massive *Histoire Naturelle*, which was meant to cover all three realms of nature identified in the Linnaean system. More than a dozen volumes of the *Histoire Naturelle* had appeared by the

[15] Bernier spent twelve years in India. His account of the Mughal Empire, the French edition of which appeared in 1670–71, was soon translated into several languages (Murr 1991: 246–48). On its historical significance, see Murr 1991; Dew 2009: 131–67; Rubiés 2013.

[16] Justin Smith claims that, although the "Nouvelle Division" admittedly contains no new or sophisticated philosophical understanding of race, it became influential as a matter of serendipity: it "happens to have been read by Leibniz, who happens to have been read by Blumenbach, who in turn wrote *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* in 1775, which served to codify the most basic outlines of racial classification" (2015: 155–56; see 143–49, 156–58). Even this estimate is an overstatement, however. Blumenbach alludes to Bernier's racial division, without mentioning his name, in the second (1781) and third (1795) editions of his *De generis humani varietate nativa*. The first edition (1776) only mentions Linnaeus's classification besides a distinction of six "varieties in the human race" by Oliver Goldsmith (Goldsmith 1774: 211–42; Blumenbach 1865: 99). In the second edition, Blumenbach adds that the first person who divided humanity was an "anonymous" writer who published a fourfold division in 1684 (1781: 49–50). In the third edition, this unnamed reference to Bernier's division is followed by a *different* fourfold division attributed to Leibniz, without any indication that the two divisions are related (1865: 266–67). Neither edition attaches any particular significance to Bernier's division. On Bernier's division vis-à-vis Leibniz's, see Carhart 2019: 151–54.

[17] I make this reference to the "Newtonian" model of science with the caveat that the nature and significance of Newton's legacy was much debated in the eighteenth century, particularly in France (Shank 2008). Those debates do not affect the basic assumptions I am making about Newtonianism in this chapter.

time Kant published his first essay on race in 1775.[18] They, together with other developments in life sciences at the time, laid the foundation on which Kant would give an unmistakably modern and original meaning to 'race' (section 4.5).

In sum, it was under two crucial background conditions that Kant, as Robert Bernasconi (2001) puts it, "invented" the modern concept of race: the availability of a massive amount of data about human inhabitants around the world, and the new Linnaean-Buffonian paradigm of studying humans and their manifest differences from one another qua organic products of nature. It is just as important to remember, however, that Kant entered the scene with his own philosophical commitments. This is why I wrote about the latter in Chapter 3 first and why, in the present chapter, the Kantian theory of race will take shape through *critical* engagements with Linnaeus and Buffon in quintessentially Kantian terms. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, regarding the question of whether Kant was "Ein Kind seiner Zeit" on the issue of race, the answer must be a combination of yes *and* no. This is not simply a matter of weighing external influences and Kant's original contributions against each other. As we can tell from his objection to subjectively historical cognition, he always aspires to philosophize on his own terms, even as he knowingly builds on the empirical data collected by others and the relevant theoretical work done by his predecessors. His raciology perfectly manifests such an aspiration.

This chapter highlights two original elements in Kant's raciology. They concern the two basic aspects of raciology that I teased apart in Chapters 1 and 2—a racial-classificatory system that divides all humans into four principal races, and a theory that links certain racialized characteristics with racially exclusionary practical outcomes. In connection with the first aspect, I draw special attention to Kant's transformation of "natural history": he pushes aside its original Baconian meaning as a description of nature and promotes its new meaning as a scientific account of the origin and development—generation and regeneration—of organic beings (plants and animals, including humans). This conceptual move marks a radical departure from Linnaeus's approach (section 4.3) and, to a large extent, from Buffon's as well (sections 4.4.1 and 4.5.1). It is also *the* crucial ingredient in Kant's theory of race that makes it original and recognizably modern. Racial classification is no longer a matter of comparing, as Linnaeus and Buffon did, more or less

[18] For a list of Kant's references to Buffon, see Mensch 2013: 185–86n165.

transitory physical features like skin color and roughly dividing humans into a few *varieties* on the basis of (dis)similarities in those features, with no sharp boundaries between any two adjacent varieties (sections 4.4.2–4.4.3). Rather, the Kantian classification purports to codify a developmental history of humanity whereby a single human phylum (*Stamm*) branched into precisely four primary *races* while adapting to four distinct climates, each race being defined by a set of characteristics that are unique to it and will remain *unfailingly hereditary* in all its future generations (section 4.5.1).

This new conceptualization of race as a sui generis biological category in turn serves as the *model* for Kant's placement of each race in human history on account of its racialized characteristics. Here we encounter what makes the second aspect of Kant's raciology original. Granted, Buffon's view that nonwhite human varieties are degenerations from the white prototype—especially when we read it along with his description of "genuine Negroes" in terms of servitude—seems to justify the white Europeans' debasing treatment of nonwhites, in spite of his passing rebuke of some diabolical slave drivers and masters (section 4.4.2). And we will notice that some of Kant's remarks about nonwhites resemble Buffon's. What makes Kant's case unique, however, is that he has an ingenious and sophisticated philosophical *system* that gives unmatched gravity to the same remarks. This will become evident when we connect his teleological conception of history with his profiling of each race in terms of hereditary temperaments and (in)capacities (section 4.5.2).

In this way, Kant's raciology also demonstrates how monogenism, the view that all human races and varieties belong to the same species, is no compassionate alternative to polygenism. We see this reflected in Boyle (section 4.2.2) and Buffon (section 4.4.4) as well. It is in Kant's work, however, where we finally see a potent combination of monogenism, racialization of human differences, and a linear view of human progress. We will connect these dots against the backdrop of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century world history, which we shall always keep in sight. The implication of racism—as exemplified by race-based exclusionary and oppressive practices—will then come into view. We will never be able to determine whether Kant the philosopher was cognizant of this implication or, if he was, whether he would be bothered by it. Again, as I said in Chapter 2, our main goal here is not to judge whether or to what extent *he* was a racist. What matters is that we shine light on the racist outlook that emerges when we read some of his writings

and teachings holistically and contextually (I will say more about why this should be what matters in the forward-looking conclusion to this book).

## 4.2. Francis Bacon, the Royal Society, and a Global Data Production

### 4.2.1. Bacon and the Program of Natural History

Kant begins his 1785 essay on race by acknowledging the existence and philosophical relevance of voluminous travel reports about human differences. The information (*Kenntnisse*) engendered by those reports, he suggests, has excited the understanding to investigate the manifoldness within the human species (BBM, 8: 91). Now imagine this hypothetical scenario: the travelers who produced those reports noticed only things that interested them personally, such as female beauty and courtship; diets, clothing, and dwellings; governance and education; how the local inhabitants viewed their relation to nature; and so forth. These interests were so divergent and their vocabularies and manners of presentation so individualized—from poems and drawings to essayistic cultural commentaries—that it would be nearly impossible to compare and crosscheck them for factual accuracy.[19] It is also likely that not many of them, except for the few who visited West Africa, for instance, would single out skin color as a major characteristic. In that case, there would be no comprehensive data about the skin color of all humans. Yet, when Kant started theorizing about race, he evidently had such data available to him. What happened?

As it turned out, the kind of data that would become *useful to natural philosophers* like Kant—as the material basis for their philosophizing—did not become available as a mere accident. To the contrary, earlier natural philosophers played a crucial role in promoting, regulating, and thereby *standardizing* global data gathering and reporting. Bacon and, following his footsteps, the Royal Society played a formative role in this regard.

[19] As I have explained in Lu-Adler 2022a, such comparability is crucial. Otherwise, Kant would not be able to say that modern travel narrators must be truthful at least out of a sense of *honor*, if not moral duty. His was a time when "historical belief carries with it astonishing credibility," precisely because "everyone [as a witness] had to be quite exact in his reports, and if someone deviated from the truth only a bit in his writings, he was ridiculed and dishonored" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 898–99).

Bacon's *Novum Organum*, as its subtitle (*sive indicia vera de interpretatione naturae*) suggests, is meant to provide a new method for what he calls the "interpretation of nature."[20] This method includes two general parts: "the first for drawing axioms from experience; the second on deducing or deriving new experiments from axioms." The former must begin with "a good, adequate natural and experimental history," which is "the foundation of the matter" and which is a necessary first step toward a true understanding of nature insofar as we are to "discover," not "invent or imagine what nature does or suffers" (2000: 109 [II.x]). Simply put, natural philosophy presupposes good data gathering. In Bacon's view, the philosophical interpreter of nature should lean on others to fulfill this preliminary task, because it is expected to be massive, complex, time-consuming, and costly. As he puts it in the *Parasceve, ad historiam naturalem et experimentalem* (1620, published together with the *Novum Organum*),[21] there should be a division of labor: while the interpreter focuses on what "relates to the actual work of the understanding," it is up to others to compile the history that contains "an abundance of good material, which is digested for the work of the interpreter" (2000: 222). To be more specific,

> the materials for the understanding are so widely scattered that we need to have *agents* and *merchants* (so to speak) seeking and collecting them *from every corner*. And in fact it is rather below the dignity of our enterprise to waste our own time on such a thing as any industrious person may do. (2000: 222–23, emphasis added).

The italicized parts of this passage are telling. They suggest an appreciation of the ever-expanding global reach of a rising British Empire.[22]

As a philosopher, Bacon sees in this worldwide expansion an opportunity to transform philosophy itself. While "nearly all the sciences we have come

[20] Bacon contrasts "interpretation of nature" with "anticipation of nature" (2000: 38 [I.xxvi]). The references to Bacon's *Novum Organum* are to the pagination of the English translation in Bacon 2000, followed by the Book and Aphorism numbers. For the Latin original (with facing-page translation) of the text, see Bacon 2004: 50–447.

[21] For the Latin original (with facing-page translation) of this text, see Bacon 2004: 448–73. I will be referring to the translation ("Preparation for a Natural and Experimental History") in Bacon 2000: 222–38.

[22] On the early formation of the British Empire, see Canny 1998, which makes clear that the terms 'British' and 'empire' should be regarded with caveats here. Also see Ash 2004, which situates Bacon's natural philosophy in the era of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603), when England became a formidable naval power and its global explorations and trades grew significantly as a result.

from the Greeks," Bacon claims, "the signs that we gather from the birthplace and family of the philosophy now in use are not good" (2000: 58–59 [I.lxxi]). A chief reason is that the ancients were extremely limited in their geographic knowledge, whereas "in our time large parts of the New World and the farthest parts of the Old are becoming known everywhere, and the store of experiences has grown immeasurably" (2000: 60 [I.lxxii]; see 2000: 68–69 [I.lxxxiv]). Bacon did not, I hasten to add, look at the possibilities opened up by the discovery of the New World (America) with a pure love of philosophy. His philosophical interest was intertwined with his role as a statesman. This role directly involved him in England's Atlantic expansion during the first quarter of the seventeenth century.[23] It also made him well positioned to ask that English agents and merchants overseas pitch in and collect the materials needed for the compilation of a natural history about everything on earth.[24]

The Baconian interpreters of nature were not entirely passive with respect to this preliminary work of data gathering. Rather, they would *instruct* data gatherers with specific guidelines and an outline of the relevant topics of natural history. That is,

> we shall first give general instructions for compiling such a history; then we shall set before men's eyes its particular form, with occasional remarks on the purpose to which the inquiry has to be fitted and adapted as well as its subject. (2000: 223)

Bacon goes on to explain the basic subjects of natural history and foregrounds its intended use as "the first matter of philosophy and the stuff and material of true induction."[25] He warns against busywork that provides little quality "information for the sciences." He specifies the various divisions of history, to ensure that "it is extensive and made to the measure of the universe." He advises the observer not to avoid "mean things, illiberal, disgusting" or "trivial, childish things." He prescribes as exact a quantification of things as possible. He instructs on how to record things based on the degree of their

[23] On this point, see Zeitlin 2021. For different perspectives on how Bacon's political and philosophical interests are interconnected, see Swann 2001: 62–74; Reiss 2005; Irving 2008: 23–46; Scalercio 2018; Welburn 2018.

[24] The appeal to merchants may have an additional layer of significance, thanks to their acquaintance with the revolutionary system of double-entry bookkeeping (Poovey 1998: 29–91).

[25] For further discussions of Baconian natural history, especially regarding its complex relation to natural philosophy, see Anstey 2012; Schwartz 2014. To appreciate the unique character of Baconian natural history (as a "discipline"), see the account of Renaissance natural history that preceded it in Ogilvie 2006 (a brief contrast between the two kinds of natural history is at 1–5 and 258–59).

reliability (or ignore them altogether if they are completely unreliable). He then ends with a few suggestions of useful things to add that may benefit the interpreters' subsequent work, such as "questions (not of causes but of fact) . . . to encourage and provoke further investigation."[26] He cautions against suppressing "anything doubtful or questionable in any account" or anything that "depresses and destroys a believer [but] will perhaps help an investigator" (2000: 223–32).

All in all, Bacon says, one must approach the materials for the first comprehensive history of nature "with utter scrupulousness, as if an oath had been taken about the truth of every detail; for it is the volume of the works of God, and . . . like a second Scripture" (2000: 231). This reference to the oath of truthful testimony resonates with Bacon's concluding statement. Using the legal "language of civil procedure,"[27] he suggests that the data gathering he is trying to orchestrate is like a cross-examination of nature, which humanity is both entitled and obliged to carry out—because God has given the human race His blessing to "recover its right over nature" (2000: 232).

Having thus argued for his general plan, Bacon presents a catalogue of 130 topics for "Particular Histories." For our purpose, it is worth noting that the largest category in the catalogue concerns "the Histories of Man" (following the histories of species, including minerals, plants, and nonhuman animals), which includes topics 41 through 128. Consider the following examples.

> 41. History of the Figure and external Members of Man, his Size, Frame, Face [*vultus*] and Features; and of their variations by People [*Gentes*] and Climate, or other minor differences.
>
> 52. History of different Conditions of the Body [*Habituum Corporis*]; Fatness, Thinness; of the so-called Complexions,[28] etc.
>
> 77. History of the Passions; as of Anger, Love, Shame etc.
>
> 78. History of the Intellectual Faculties: Thought, Imagination, Discourse, Memory etc.

[26] This remark raises an important philosophical question about what Bacon (and his early modern followers) meant by "fact." On this topic, see Daston 1991; Poovey 1998: 7–15, 97–120; Shapiro 2000.

[27] Bacon's background as a lawyer is relevant here (Shapiro 2000: 8–33).

[28] The term 'complexion' here does not mean what we now take it to mean. It does not mean the color, texture, or appearance of skin. Rather, it means the proportional combination of four humors (*cold* or *hot*, and *moist* or *dry*) that determines one's bodily habit and temperament. See "complexion, n." at OED Online, www.oed.com/view/Entry/37678 (accessed April 11, 2021).

120. History of the Naval Art, and the related techniques and arts.
121. History of Athletics and of Human Exercise of every kind. (2000: 235–37)

Looking at this list, one can see why a later philosopher theorizing about race would make confident pronouncements about non-Europeans regarding their facial features, temperaments, passions, intellectual abilities, and arts and sciences (or lack thereof). Europeans still had a long way to go, however, before they could racialize human differences as Kant would do. Bacon did find some of the reported differences particularly striking. Comparing "the life of men in any of the most civilised provinces of Europe and in the most savage and barbarous region of New [American] India," for instance, he judges that "they differ so much that deservedly it may be said that 'man is a God to man', not only for help and benefit, but also in the contrast between their conditions" (2000: 100 [I.cxxix]). Bacon did not thereby racialize the supposed difference between the Europeans and Amerindians, though. He lacked a classificatory scheme that would assign them to distinct "races," whereby their perceived differences could be theorized as natural effects and as hereditary biomarkers.

It is nonetheless fair to say that Bacon laid a crucial foundation for subsequent thinkers to take further steps toward racialization, especially with the help of the early Royal Society. Among other things, the Society would pick up where Bacon left off with respect to particular histories, by specifying the questions to be investigated on each topic. This was to ensure a systematic data gathering—particularly in faraway regions of the world—that was critical to the Society's own philosophical agenda at the time.[29] In the process, *skin color*, which was absent from Bacon's catalogue of topics, would emerge as a salient topic of scientific research. Robert Boyle would play a particularly influential role in this regard.[30]

[29] On this point, see Rubiés 1996; Carey 1997; Swann 2001: 55–96; Hunter 2007: 12–17.

[30] Like Bacon, Boyle was directly involved in England's colonial projects (Irving 2008: 69–92; Malcolmson 2013: 15–21). On Boyle's relation to the early Royal Society, see Hunter 2007. On the entire Royal Society's ties and indebtedness to British colonial practices, including the slave trade, see Govier 1999; Murphy 2013. On the lasting impact of the program of Baconian natural history on the Royal Society (through the late eighteenth century), see Gascoigne 2009.

### 4.2.2. Boyle and a Scientific Attention to Skin Color

Two of Boyle's writings helped to foreground skin color as a distinct topic for data gathering and philosophical investigation. One is his *Experiment and Considerations Touching Colours* (1664),[31] which contains a dedicated inquiry about the cause of the blackness of "Negroes" in the so-called Experiment XI (1664: 151–67). The other is a short piece entitled "General Heads for a Natural History of a Countrey, Great or Small," published in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* in 1666. The latter would serve as a template for instructions to prospective data-gathering agents.

Boyle chose for the epigraph of the *Colours* the following proposition from Bacon's *Novum Organum*: *Non fingendum, aut excogitandum, sed inveniendum, quid Natura faciat, aut ferat* (we are not to feign or contrive, but discover, what nature does or suffers). This statement appears in the context where Bacon wrote that the interpreter of nature must begin with a good "natural and experimental history" (2000: 109 [II.x]). In the spirit of this advice, Boyle, having discussed the production of colors in general and leaving open a range of hypotheses about its causal mechanism, lists a series of "experiments" about whiteness and blackness to assist further inquiry. "Experiment XI" focuses on black skin. It begins by noting that the cause of this color in "Negroes" has been a subject of prolonged scholarly dispute (1664: 151–52). Boyle then mentions and rejects two commonly held views on this topic, before submitting his own conjecture.

Boyle's first target is the hypothesis that "the Heat of the Climate wherein they live, is the reason, why so many Inhabitants of the Scorching Regions of *Africa* are Black" (1664: 152). This climate hypothesis draws on the phenomenon that "the Heat of the Sun may Darken the Colour of the Skin." Boyle counters that heat alone cannot produce "a true Blackness, like that of *Negroes*" (1664: 153). He invokes travel reports to support this counter. The crucial point is that, populations living in the same climate zone do not always have the same skin color. For instance, no "Navigators and Travellers to the *West Indies*" have found any black *natives* there—"for the Blacks now there have been by the *Europeans* long Transplanted thither"—although the New World contains a range of climates from the torrid to the tropical (1664: 153–54).

[31] I thank Dwight Lewis for drawing my attention to this text.

Next comes the Curse of Ham hypothesis, according to which "the Blackness of *Negroes* [was] an effect of *Noah's* Curse ratify'd by God's, upon *Cham*" (1664: 159).[32] Boyle has two points against it. The first is a methodological one: although a "Naturalist" may believe in biblical stories, immediately appealing to a supernatural cause in this case would amount to "Shifting off the Difficulty, instead of Resolving it; for we enquire not the First and Universal, but the Proper, Immediate, and Physical Cause of the Jetty Colour of *Negroes*." Second, it is not evident that blackness is a curse at all, since it is not inconsistent with beauty and some nations depict devils as white (1664: 159–60).

More probably, Boyle surmises, the principal if not sole cause of blackness is "some Peculiar and Seminal Impression." This accounts for observations of blacks and whites, respectively, who have long resided in foreign climates: "the Off-spring of Negroes Transplanted out of *Africa*, above a hundred years ago, retain still the Complexion of their Progenitors," and "[neither] the White people removing into very Hot Climates . . . nor their Children have been observ'd, even in the Countreys of *Negroes*, to descend to a Colour amounting to that of the Natives" (1664: 161). That being said, Boyle deems it possible that the "Race of *Negroes*" might still have somehow descended from Adam: it is not necessary that whites only beget whites and blacks, blacks; rather, given that there may be various "concurrent causes" in the production of a skin color, it is "at least as possible, that White Parents may sometimes have Black Children, as that *African Negroes* should sometimes have lastingly White ones" (1664: 166).

In terms of its content, there is little originality in this discussion of the cause of black skin. Two chapters of Thomas Browne's (1605–82) popular *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (commonly known as the *Vulgar Errors*), published earlier (1646) than Boyle's treatise on colors, are about the "blackness of Negroes" (1904: 367–87).[33] Why, Browne asks, "some men, yea and they a mighty and considerable part of mankind, should first acquire and still retain the gloss and tincture of blackness" (1904: 368)? Browne's arguments against the two common explanations—the heat of sun and the Curse of Ham (1904: 369–87)—are strikingly similar to and even more elaborate than

[32] On historical uses of the biblical Curse of Ham in connection with racism and slavery, see Braude 1997; Whitford 2009; Goldenberg 2017.

[33] For contextual analyses of Browne's work on human skin, see Barbour 2008; Collins and Denmead 2008. For a broader analysis of the establishment of "black skin" as a scientific problem in early modern Europe, in which Browne played a weighty role, see Koslofsky 2014.

Boyle's. Browne's own conjectural explanation also anticipates Boyle's: all humans descended from "the seed of *Adam*," which must be white as "all seed was white"; only that certain "mutations" in physical features took place subsequently (much like dogs came to have different shapes, hairs, etc.); no matter how the mutation that resulted in black skin happened, "it is evidently maintained by generation, and by the tincture of the skin as a spermatical part traduced from father unto Son"; that is, blackness is hereditary through some sort of "seminal" process (1904: 377–80).[34]

Regardless of whether Boyle simply borrowed his account of the "blackness of Negroes" from Browne, both men seemed keenly aware of the potential for a better philosophy afforded by the "modern geography" (Browne 1904: 374) that European explorations overseas made possible. The entire world now appeared to be a giant laboratory capable of generating ample data for testing the veracity of certain hypotheses, such as the climate hypothesis. Boyle would go further than Browne, however, by playing a more proactive role in this global data mining. He would thereby help to establish skin color as a distinct subject of scientific inquiry, to be conducted with a proper (Baconian) methodology. In this regard, Boyle's decision to investigate the "blackness of Negroes" in a *scientific* treatise on colors was already significant. His "General Heads" (1666) took a step further, answering the Baconian call for "the Composing of a good Natural History, to superstruct, in time, a *Solid* and *Useful* Philosophy upon" (1666: 186).

Boyle's "heads" mirror Bacon's catalogue of particular histories. A notable difference is that Boyle's instruction contains an explicit reference to skin color, which was absent from Bacon's catalogue:

> there must be a careful account given of the *Inhabitants* themselves, both *Natives* and *Strangers*, that have been long settled there: And in particular, their Stature, Shape, Colour, Features, Strength, Agility, Beauty (or the want of it) Complexions, Hair, Dyet, Inclinations, and Customs that seem not due to Education. (1666: 188)

Boyle has two likely reasons for wanting more data about skin color. First, considering that the climate hypothesis remained popular,[35] more

[34] Browne speaks of "seminality," "seminal principle," "seminal matter," "seminal humour," and so on, throughout his discussions of plants and animals in general.

[35] The climate hypothesis had support among prominent members of the Royal Society and would continue to be debated and revised in responses to objections (Malcolmson 2013: 65–66, 73–75).

comprehensive data about the skin colors of both natives and long-settled strangers in a single climate can further discredit that hypothesis. Second, Boyle still needs to substantiate his monogenetic view that "Negroes" are descendants of Adam as much as Europeans are, by showing *how* it is possible for a supposedly white ancestor to produce his first black son(s), who would then propagate hereditarily black offspring to posterity through seminal impressions. Boyle's position on this matter in "Experiment XI" is at best vague. At one point, he seems to suggest that Adam produced his first black son(s) by mere chance, just as some white raven has reportedly produced a jetty black one. But he also cites three testimonies to the effect that, like Europeans, blacks are "Born White, and change their Colour in two dayes to a Perfect Black" (1664: 165), a phenomenon that may be considered as supporting Browne's conjecture that, although black skin is "seminal," their "seed" is white (Browne 1904: 379).[36] At any rate, Boyle cannot just base this view on a few anecdotal reports. He needs more data specifically about skin color.[37]

Boyle's own motives aside, the "General Heads" played an instrumental role in drawing the natural philosophers' and, through them, the global data gathers', attention to this topic. As Cristina Malcolmson puts it,

> Boyle's desire to gather information about color and culture expanded into a multifaceted system in which the reports of European travelers worldwide evoked new sets of queries, and consequently new reports.[38] . . . these reports started to reproduce each other, such that a passage of observations on skin color . . . became a standard part of travelers' narratives . . . Thus the Society produced a new discourse on the causes of skin color, in which the "gaze of natural philosophy" constructed the natural philosopher and

[36] The claim that blacks were born white was apparently common through the eighteenth century. Kant repeats it in his physical geography (PG, 9: 312; V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 88).

[37] Presumably, this more systematic gathering of information about skin color was not limited to that of blacks. The Royal Society fellows, including Boyle, also wanted to know whether Amerindians are born white (Malcolmson 2013: 37–39).

[38] The travel reports were not limited to those produced by Englishmen (Malcolmson 57–61; see Jones 1983). And the practice of philosophers *soliciting* reports and *regulating* their production with specific instructions would extend beyond London. Some French *philosophes*, for instance, would also proactively request information from travelers by providing questionnaires with methodological and practical advice to guide their observations. Bernier, for one, was given this kind of advice for his travels to India and some other regions (Dew 2009: 155–61). On the making of the French "philosophe" and the English influence, see Wade 1977: 3–25, 120–72.

> indigenous subject according to colonial but not yet entirely racialized models. (Malcolmson 2013: 63–64)[39]

The "General Heads," which is only four pages long, could have this extent of impact largely thanks to the fact that its author was a powerful member of a well-connected institution (the Royal Society), which as a whole was eager to tap into the opportunities afforded by England's global expansion. The thirst for information about foreign lands, resources, and inhabitants was already there. The "General Heads," as one of the many sets of queries issued by or with the approval of the Royal Society, provided the template for subsequent queries.[40] In this way, Boyle would affect the development of natural history well into the eighteenth century, which might not have been the case "but for the influence of the Royal Society" (Hunter 2007: 20).

The Royal Society, with its ample supply of curious minds, would also play a role in making meaning of the available data. The link between skin color and the question of "race" would thereby become even more salient than it was in Boyle's own work. While Boyle used the expression 'Race of *Negroes*' once (1664: 166), he apparently attached no philosophical significance to it. This would change toward the end of the century. One topic discussed at a Royal Society meeting in March 1690 was "the Colours of Animalls, and particularly of the Negroes, whether it was the product of the Climate or that they were a Distinct race of Men."[41] Although it is unclear what the fellows at the meeting understood by 'race,' it is noteworthy that they brought up race besides the climate theory, presumably as an alternative *explanation* of the skin color of "Negroes." If climate is only an external factor, race points to an internal cause.[42]

Malcolmson argues that this reference to a distinct race marks the emergence of polygenism in the Royal Society, which follows the path of the so-called pre-Adamism and which is opposed to Boyle's belief in "Biblical

[39] On the scientific studies of human differences in the eighteenth-century Britain, when skin color and "race" became firmly associated, see Wheeler 2000.

[40] On the relation between Boyle's "General Heads" and other sets of queries issued by the Royal Society, see Hunter 2007: 12–21; Malcolmson 2013: 37–64. For a reorganized and abbreviated version of the "General Heads" later published by the Royal Society, see Hunter 2007: 22–23.

[41] Cited in Malcolmson 2013: 65. Malcolmson also notes that "Negroes a distinct race of men" was listed as a separate category for recording the minutes of the Society's meetings from 1685 and 1690 (2013: 69).

[42] For a quick overview of subsequent debates about the cause of skin color (especially blackness), see Mazzolini 2002.

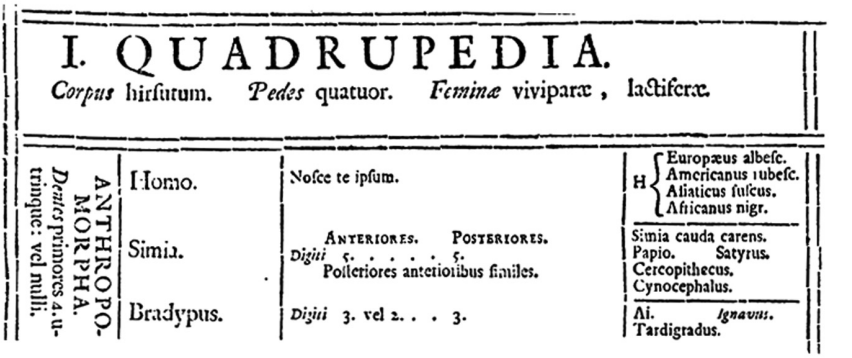
monogenesis" (Malcolmson 2013: 65–112).[43] The challenge facing Boyle, or anyone who wishes to follow him in defending monogenism, is to work out an explanation that can serve as a truly viable alternative to the climate theory. If, according to the available data about foreign inhabitants, they are markedly different from the Europeans in skin color, hair, temperament, and so on, an inevitable question arises for the natural philosopher who believes in monogenism: *how*—by what *natural* mechanism—is it possible for all these divergences to come from a single origin? The inability to answer this question would give polygenism the appearance of an easy alternative. Someone like Boyle cannot simply invoke the orthodox biblical exegesis to justify his support for monogenism *as a natural philosopher*: it is one thing to hold biblical monogenesis as a matter of faith, but another to establish monogenism as a *scientific* theory.

No matter whether Boyle or other fellows of the Royal Society can successfully defend monogenism, one thing is clear. As Malcolmson insightfully puts it, monogenesis is "not the compassionate opposite of polygenesis." If polygenism can be used by some to justify slavery, the fate of monogenism is not necessarily better. Rather, it provides a framework for comparative ranking, whereby Europeans may see themselves as superior and entitled to "rule over" others (Malcolmson 2013: 112). If this is true of biblical monogenism, the same can be said of scientific monogenism. As we shall see, the latter may even have something more sinister to it. To borrow yet another expression from Malcolmson, the drive to investigate, to be grounded in dutifully gathered "matters of fact," and to philosophize rigorously, can shield natural philosophers from experiencing "the intense moral struggle" that they otherwise might have had to contend with (2013: 78).

## 4.3. The Beginning of a Paradigm Shift: Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* and Human Varieties

Kant, in his first announcement about his lectures on physical geography (1757), divides nature into three kingdoms—animals, plants, and minerals.

[43] Pre-Adamism challenges the biblical account of single human origin (Adamism). It holds that God created different peoples and different civilizations—for example, the Chinese, Egyptian, and Ethiopian—in different parts of the world before there was Adam. The most prominent representative of this view in Boyle's time was Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676), who published *Prae-Adamitae* in 1655. On the history of pre-Adamism, the content and impact of La Peyrère's views, and the complicated relation between pre-Adamism and racism, see Popkin 1987; Livingstone 2008.



I. QUADRUPEDIA.

*Corpus* hirſutum. *Pedes* quatuor. *Feminæ* viviparæ, lactiferæ.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ANTHROPOMORPHA. *Dentes primores 4. utrinque: vel nulli.* | Homo. | Noſce te ipſum. | H { Europæus albeſc. Americanus rubeſc. Aſiaticus fuſcus. Africanus nigr. |
| | Simia. | ANTERIORES. POSTERIORES. *Digiti* 5. . . . . 5. Poſteriores antecioribus ſimiles. | Simia cauda carens. Papio. Satyrus. Cercopithecus. Cynocephalus. |
| | Bradypus. | *Digiti* 3. vel 2. . . 3. | Ai. *Ignavus.* Tardigradus. |

**Figure 4.2.** The classification of man in Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735).

Humans, being part of the animal kingdom, are "considered and compared in respect of their differences in natural shape and colour in various regions of the Earth." Kant intends thereby to explain, among other things, "those tendencies of human beings that are derived from the zone in which they live," so as to "acquaint man better with himself" (EACG, 2: 9). This consideration of humans as part of the animal kingdom is a significant departure from Bacon's system of particular histories I mentioned earlier (Bacon treated humans as a separate category from animals). Its source is Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*. In the first edition of this work (1735), Linnaeus places *Homo* in the class of *Quadupedia* (four-footed animals), at the order of *Anthropomorpha* (the human-like) along with *Simia* (apes) and *Bradypus* (sloth). *Homo* is differentiated from these other genera in virtue of its ability for self-cognition (*Nosce te ipsum*),[44] a point that is also reflected in Kant's announcement just mentioned. Linnaeus then divides the genus *Homo* into four varieties: whitish Europeans, reddish Americans, tawny or dark (*fuscus*) Asians,[45] and blackish Africans (1735: folio 10; see Figure 4.2).[46]

[44] Linnaeus subsequently elaborated on this dictum of knowing oneself in various aspects, from physiology to morality and theology (1758: 20–22n*).

[45] In note 13, I mentioned that Bernier treated the populations in Asia as largely "white." He saw Indians as "yellow," but still grouped them with most of the Europeans in the first race. This suggests that, in the seventeenth century, Asians were yet to be classified together as a race marked by a darker skin color. This would not become a distinct racial marker of Asians until the eighteenth century, as in Linnaeus's taxonomy. On this point, see Keevak 2011: 23–69.

[46] The 1735 edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* contains eleven unnumbered folios (besides the cover page). I am referring to the folio numbers as I have counted them. On the *classes*, *orders*, *genera*, *species*, and *varieties* in Linnaeus's system of nature, see Larson 1971: 50–121.

The *Systema Naturae* went through twelve ever-expanding editions during Linnaeus's lifetime. The tenth edition, the first volume of which was published in 1758, represents a turning point in his thinking about the classification of man, now called *Homo sapiens* and placed at the order of *Primates* in the class of *Mammalia* (mammals).[47] The four varieties of humans mentioned above are no longer differentiated just by skin color. Rather, each variety is described by five lines of characteristics. The first line lists skin color, temperament, and overall physical form. The second describes hair, eye color, and certain facial features. The third concerns natural dispositions or habits of the mind. The fourth includes customs such as body painting and clothing. The fifth states what each variety is ruled by. Here I only include the first, third, and fifth lines.[48]

| | |
|---|---|
| American | red, choleric, upright (*rectus*) |
| | obstinate, light-hearted (*hilaris*), free |
| | ruled by custom (*regitur consuetudine*) |
| European | white, sanguine, brawny (*torosus*) |
| | smooth (*levis*), acute, inventor |
| | ruled by rites or fixed laws (*ritibus*) |
| Asian | sallow (*luridus*), melancholic, rigid |
| | severe, haughty, avaricious |
| | ruled by opinions |
| African | black, phlegmatic, relaxed (*laxus*) |
| | crafty, slothful, negligent |
| | ruled by caprice (*arbitrio*)[49] |

The four-continent structure of this division of human varieties remains the same through all twelve editions of the *Systema*

[47] On Linnaeus's evolving classification of man, see Broberg 1983; Skott 2014.

[48] This expanded 1758 list of criteria might be a response to Buffon's methodological criticism of the Linnaean taxonomy and Buffon's own multifaceted account of human varieties, both of which appeared in 1749. I will discuss these in section 4.4.

[49] Linnaeus 1758: 20–22. For discussions, see Müller-Wille 2014: 200–204; Skott 2019: 223–27 (with a special emphasis on how the growing travel literature about Asia, especially the reports generated from the Swedish trade with China, must have influenced Linnaeus's account of the Asian variety and, in particular, his altered description of their skin color). One population Linnaeus traveled to study personally was the "Lapps." If, as I pointed out in note 13, Bernier regarded this population as so ugly and wretched that it should be treated as a separate race or species, Linnaeus constructed a myth of "happy Lapp" (Koerner 1999: 56–81). Meanwhile, there is no obvious place for the "Lapps" in Linnaeus's rigid fourfold division of human varieties (Müller-Wille 2015: 198).

*Naturae*,[50] and skin color continues to be the leading characteristic of each variety. As Staffan Müller-Wille sees it, when Linnaeus introduced the bare minimum of the classification in 1735 using the four continents as "a kind of geographic grid that helped him to orient himself on a global scale," that classification "was not so much the result of a careful synthesis of previously established facts, but rather a deliberate and arbitrary projection to support the future accumulation of facts" (2015: 199–200). It is true that Linnaeus actively promoted the "scientific travel" that gathered data about the three kingdoms of nature from around the globe.[51] But his antecedent attachment to the four-continent grid of the world made it unlikely that he would ever adopt a fundamentally different way of organizing the global data about humans, the collection of which was growing with the expansion of the European trading and colonizing activities.

Kant, whose racial classification also reflects the four-continent structure, would locate the problem with the Linnaean division elsewhere: as a division based merely on comparisons, it is not a proper *system* of nature at all. A system "presupposes an idea of the *whole*, from which the diversity of things is derived," Kant argues. By contrast, Linnaeus's so-called system of nature is in fact only an *aggregation* of nature, whereby "things are simply put together and arranged in series" (PG, 9: 159–60; see GTP, 8: 163–64).[52] To Kant, there is a distinction between *logical* and *physical* ways of differentiating things.[53] The Linnaean taxonomy exemplifies the former.

[50] On the history of the continental structuring of the world, see Lewis and Wigen 1997. It will also be illuminating to consider how the four continents were personified in the early modern era (see the essays collected in Horowitz and Arizzoli 2020).

[51] On Linnaeus's active promotion of and instructions for scientific travels, see Sörlin 1989; Nyberg 2009. For a study that connects the Linnaean (Swedish) scientific travels with the ones promoted by other European powers, see Sörlin 2000.

[52] It does not follow that a Linnaean classification would be unprincipled. It is just that its underlying principle would only be an arbitrary principle for observing sensible similarities and dissimilarities among objects. Kant mentions one example of such a principle, namely "Linné's principle of the persistence of the character of the pollinating parts of plants, without which the systematic *description of nature* of the vegetable kingdom would not have been ordered and enlarged in so praiseworthy a manner" (GTP, 8: 161). On the arbitrariness of such principles and of Linnaeus's in particular, see Buffon 1976: 151–54, 164–66.

[53] Kant is distinguishing a *logical division* "according to concepts" and a *physical division* according to space and time. The former is an artificial "register of the whole, wherein I situate all things, each in the class to which it belongs, even if on earth they are to be found in widely separated areas." What matters in this case is only "similarity of form." By contrast, what matters most to a physical division is "place of birth." Such a division is concerned "with nature, the earth itself, and those places where things are actually encountered." The result is a "geographical description of nature," a description of things "in terms of the places they occupy on earth" (PG, 9: 159–60).

> The appellations of the *classes* and *orders* [in Linnaeus's taxonomy] express quite unambiguously a merely logical separation which reason makes among its concepts for the purpose of comparison only. However, *genera* and *species* can also refer to the *physical* separation which *nature* itself makes among its creatures with respect to their *generation* (*Erzeugung*). (GTP, 8: 163n)

To explain, Kant distinguishes two kinds of classification with respect to living creatures. One is artificial or school classification (*Schuleintheilung*), whereby things are divided into various classes on the basis of similarity and dissimilarity. The other is natural classification (*Natureintheilung*), which concerns phyla (*Stämme*) and divides creatures "according to *relationships* in terms of generation" (VRM, 2: 429).[54] Things are brought under a nominal or artificial species (*Nominalgattung*, *species artificialis*) in the first case "insofar as they stand under a common mark of mere comparison," but under a real or natural one (*Realgattung*, *species naturalis*) in the second case on account of sharing the same phyletic origin (GTP, 8: 178; see BBM, 8: 102).[55] In these terms, Kant differentiates "description of nature" (*Naturbeschreibung*) and "natural history" (*Naturgeschichte*) properly so called. The former consists in a mere "cognition of natural things as they *are now*," whereas the latter gives us cognition of things as "they once *were* and of the series of changes they underwent to arrive at each place in their present state" (VRM, 2: 434n; see BBM, 8: 100n).

Thus, if Linnaeus never used the term 'race' in reference to humans, it is not just because he saw the four human sorts only as *accidentally* differentiated "environmental varieties," not as *essentially* differentiated "stable (sub)species" (Müller-Wille 2015: 194–96).[56] From Kant's perspective, Linnaeus's so-called system of nature, as a logical and merely descriptive one, simply cannot accommodate a scientific concept of race. This concept instead belongs in a

[54] On the eighteenth-century controversy over natural versus artificial systems of classification, see Lefèvre 2001.

[55] According to Staffan Müller-Wille (2013: 310–16), Linnaeus also distinguished artificial and natural systems or methods of taxonomy, albeit in a sense that is rather different from Kant's distinction. Interestingly, Kant seems to treat the human species in two ways, depending on what it is related to. It is a real or natural species with respect to the races and varieties falling under it, but a nominal or artificial species in relation to the *genus* (animal) under which it stands in contrast to other animals. In the latter regard, the human species is "understood in accordance with its universal marks in the description of nature" (GTP, 8: 164). We can connect this move with Kant's rejection of the idea of nature as a continuous chain of organic beings (8: 179–80).

[56] On how the Linnaean species, conceived either by Linnaeus himself or by his followers, was not essentialist, also see Winsor 2006; McOuat 2009.

system of "natural history" in the strict Kantian sense (GTP, 8: 164).[57] By the then-standard practice (à la Kant), the word *Geschichte* is "taken to mean the same as the Greek *historia* (narrative, description)." This captures the sense in which Linnaeus, following the Baconian tradition, sees natural history.[58] Kant, by contrast, wants to use the term to "designate the investigation of origin in nature" (GTP, 8: 162–63). With this distinction between "natural history" in the Baconian sense as a mere description of nature and its Kantian sense as a physical system of organisms with respect to generation, there also arises the question about the meaning of 'race.' Alluding to the controversial nature of this issue, Kant says:

> What is a *race*? The word does not figure in a system of the description of nature, therefore presumably the thing itself is nowhere in nature either. Yet the *concept* designated by this expression is well grounded in the reason of each observer of nature who infers from a hereditary particularity of different interbreeding animals that does not at all lie in the concept of their species a common cause, namely a cause that lies originally in the phylum of the species. The fact that this word does not occur in the description of nature (but instead of it that of variety), cannot prevent the observer of nature from finding it necessary with respect to natural history. (GTP, 8: 163)

The parenthetical reference to "variety" in this passage suggests that Kant may be targeting the Linnaean model, whose *systema naturae* only counts as a description of nature and therefore cannot establish any proper racial distinction.[59]

If 'race' is nevertheless a concept implicitly used by the investigator of nature (*Naturforscher*) who explains certain hereditary particularities by seeing them as somehow generated from a shared phyletic origin, Kant finds it necessary to make the concept clear and distinct. He summarizes his final take on this point in his 1788 race essay:

[57] For an incisive exposition of why race has no place in the Linnaean natural history, see Doron 2012: 81–86.

[58] On the Baconian legacy in Linnaeus's approach to natural history, see Müller-Wille 2008.

[59] The varieties that figure in Kant's own system of natural history, the so-called *varietates nativae* (GTP, 8: 164), are significantly different from the Linnaean varieties. In the Kantian system, what characterizes a variety is still hereditary. Unlike racial characteristics, it is not unfailingly hereditary. Like races, tough, varieties must also be developed from a common original phylum (VRM, 2: 430–31; GTP, 8: 165–68). Kant would therefore assign his varieties to natural history proper, whereas the Linnaean varieties belong in a mere description of nature.

> The name *race*, as *radical* peculiarity indicating a common phyletic origination and at the same time permitting several such persistently hereditary character not only of the same animal species but also of the same phylum, is quite suitably conceived. I would translate it through *subspecies* [*Abartung*] (*progenies classifica*), in order to distinguish a race from the *degeneration* [*Ausartung*] (*degeneratio s. progenies specifica*), which one cannot admit because it is contrary to the law of nature (in the preservation of its kind in unchangeable form). (GTP, 8: 163–64; see Girtanner 1796: 5–6)

Kant has built two substantive claims into this analysis of "race." One is scientific monogenism, according to which different races not only belong to the same animal species but must also be *derivable* from a single phylum. Thus, "the concept of a race contains first the concept of a common phylum." This "unity of the phylum" entails that the classification of races—on account of certain persistently hereditary features—cannot be a distinction of "kinds [*Arten*]" (BBM, 8: 99–100; see VRM, 2: 430). The other substantive claim is that racial differentiation cannot be a matter of degeneration, but due to some other *generative* process.[60]

With these two claims, Kant is going beyond not only Linnaeus but also Buffon. Buffon, as we shall see in section 4.4, supports monogenism by arguing that all human varieties are derived from the same original human prototype through *degenerations* under the influence of environmental factors, especially climate. He also believes that the decision about where to draw the line between the principal varieties of humanity is inevitably arbitrary or *artificial*, in that nature itself contains only a continuum of insensible transitions from one variety to another within the same species. With this caveat, Buffon strives to be as methodologically savvy and as *grounded in empirical data* as possible. This empiricist approach is evident in how he builds his division of human varieties on an analysis of comprehensive and the most up-to-date data at his disposal. This makes Buffon responsive to new empirical evidence in a way that Kant, who treats empirical observations in a heavy-handed rationalist manner (as we saw in Chapter 3), cannot be.

Meanwhile, both Buffon and Kant, despite their differences from Linnaeus as well as from each another, are indebted to the Linnaean

[60] This rejection of *Ausartung* (*degeneratio*) is only explicit in the 1788 essay. As I shall explain in section 4.5.1, Kant holds the opposite view in the 1775/77 essay, where he treats *Ausartung* as a type of *Abartung* and associates race with the former.

taxonomy. Their writings about human differences will build on two major developments spurred by this taxonomy. On the one hand, if the original Linnaean taxonomical system was introduced to manage the "information overload" resulted from decades of global data gathering that preceded it (Müller-Wille and Charmantier 2012), it in turn inspired more gathering of data in all three realms of nature. Linnaeus's own practice of constantly revising and expanding his *Systema Naturae* already indicates the need to catch up with data. Still, there will come a point when, to other empirically minded natural philosophers, the Linnaean taxonomy may seem too limited to accommodate the growing data or to capture the complexities revealed thereby.[61]

On the other hand, Linnaeus's decision to embed a classification of humans within an overarching system of nature, placing the human being at the order of primates, promises to inspire a lot of philosophical debates and investigations. One may ask the following questions, for instance. Regarding the natural relation between humans and nonhuman animals, is it an unbridgeable leap from one to the other, or is there rather a continuum between the two, with intermediate species yet to be discovered?[62] Regarding the human varieties, if they seem so different in so many ways, (how) can they really belong in the same natural species? I will focus

[61] Blumenbach best exemplifies this point. Once a follower of Linnaeus's fourfold division (Blumenbach 1865: 99), Blumenbach soon felt compelled by new empirical evidence to abandon it and to adopt the fivefold division that is now commonly associated with him—Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay (1781: 51–52; 1865: 264–66, 269–75). The impetus came from the vast amount of newly available data and materials collected through James Cook's voyages to the South Seas (Blumenbach 1865: 150). For this, Blumenbach was indebted to Joseph Banks (1743–1820). Banks was the longest serving president of the Royal Society (1778–1820). He was well placed to be "the foremost agent of [Baconian] natural history" (Werrett 2019: 425) and to amass, through an extensive network of collectors, one of the most prominent natural history collections in the late eighteenth century—more than the old Linnaean system could accommodate (Mackay 1996; Rose 2019). The collection included skulls, a crucial source of comparative anatomy. Some of the skulls would go to Blumenbach, serving as the basis for his new division of humanity (Turnbull 1999; Fishburn 2017; Böker 2019; Kühnast 2019/20).

[62] Kant is evidently attuned to the controversies around this question. He sharply distinguishes the human species from all other creatures on earth (Anth, 7: 321–25, with a reference to Linnaeus at 322; see V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1194–95). But he also uses the image of a mere animal to depict the natural state of humanity and some currently existing human "savages." When he comments on Linnaeus's treatment of humans as animals in one of his lectures on anthropology, he uses it to introduce the following question: "if the human being were in a savage state, and had no use of reason, what [sort of] animal would he in fact be there?" His answer is that such a being can only be an ugly—for "the human being makes himself beautiful through the understanding"—though "very dexterous animal." To offer actual "examples," Kant chooses William Dampier's (1652–1715) travelogue (Dampier 1697), which contains notoriously dehumanizing portraits of "savages" like the "Hottentots" of the Cape of Good Hope and the "New Hollanders" of Australia (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 675–76; see V-Anth/Collins, 25: 13–14; V-PG/Hesse, 26.2: 272–74). On Dampier, see Neill 2000.

on the latter question. It reflects the same philosophical challenge that I mentioned while discussing Boyle, namely the need to defend monogenism as a scientific theory.

Linnaeus, by placing humans within a comprehensive system of nature and basically on a par with other animals in the eye of the natural philosopher, has also introduced a new methodological constraint on anyone who wishes to defend *scientific* monogenism. Insofar as one needs to explain human differences *as law-governed products of nature*, a preferable explanation is one that does not unnecessarily introduce new laws or causal mechanisms. That is, one must explain the manifest variations within the same human species in accordance with certain universal or universalizable laws of nature, laws that can explain as many analogous phenomena as possible. In particular, now that the human being as a product of nature belongs squarely in the animal kingdom, it seems desirable to explain the supposedly natural variations within the human species in basically the same way as one explains the variations within any other animal species.

I will consider how Buffon carries out this explanatory project next.[63] I will then explain how Kant builds on and transcends Buffon's work. In the process, I will take a closer look at the very concept of *natural history*, the transformation of which is key to Kant's theory of race. I will also highlight and compare the ways in which Buffon and Kant respond to the realities of race-based chattel slavery ("racial slavery" for short) when the opportunities arise, particularly within the context of theorizing about human differences.

[63] We shall see in section 4.4 that Buffon's work, especially his revised climate hypothesis and his account of "degeneration" as a natural mechanism, would reflect an awareness of other intellectual currents at the time. What may be relevant is a scientific event that happened between the first edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735) and the publication of the first few volumes of Buffon's work on natural history (1749). In 1739, the Bordeaux Academy of Sciences published the topic for their 1741 essay contest in the *Journal des Savants*, Europe's leading scientific journal at the time. The topic appeared in the form of a puzzle about the "physical cause" of the "Negro" skin color and hair texture and of their "degeneration" (Gates and Curran 2022: ix; see 3–25 on the relevant historical context—particularly France's involvement in slavery—for the contest). Entries arrived from around Europe. They presented a range of hypotheses, most of which sought to preserve the monogenetic framework. See Gates and Curran 2022: 25–43 for an overview of those hypotheses, the centrality of the presumption of "degeneration," the prominence of the climate hypothesis, and the relation of the 1741 contest to the eventual birth of the modern concept of race in the 1770s (through Kant's as well as Blumenbach's work).

## 4.4. Buffon: Scientific Monogenism, Degeneration, and the Problem of Slavery

### 4.4.1. Buffon on Natural History, with a Critique of the Linnaean Taxonomy

The first thing to note in Buffon's case is the title of his *Histoire Naturelle*, thirty-six volumes of which were prepared by him and published between 1749 and 1789. Reportedly, the work was initially not received by Buffon's contemporaries as a natural "history" for the reason that he appeared to be operating with a novel sense thereof (Hoquet 2010: 34).[64] Some have suggested that the transition from the Baconian or Linnaean descriptive natural history to the Buffonian *developmental* or *genealogical* history of nature was key to the development of Kant's theory of race (Sloan 2006; Doron 2012).[65] This suggestion is debatable, however. For one, the nature of Buffon's "history" remains unclear to this day.[66] For another, when Kant published his first essay on race (1775/77), he evidently did not see Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*—the volumes published before 1778—as a *Naturgeschichte* strictly speaking (I will explain this point in section 4.5.1). Indeed, as we shall see, Buffon's division of human varieties belongs to what Kant would call a mere description of nature. At the same time, however, Buffon developed a notion of *species* and a degenerative model of monogenesis that would serve as the launch pad for Kant's attempt to derive four human races from a single original phylum in his 1775/77 essay. I will explain these points in the current section. Among other things, I will highlight Buffon's methodology in connection with the Baconian natural history and the Linnaean taxonomy, respectively.

[64] On the initial reception of Buffon's work in Germany, see Sloan 1979: 121–23. *Histoire Naturelle* was translated into German first as *Historie der Natur* (in the 1750s) and then as *Naturgeschichte* (in 1771). On the significance of this change, see Schmitt 2019: 249–50. The term *Geschichte* does occur in the first translation, though. It appears to be contrasted with *Beschreibung* (description). See note 71 below.

[65] Phillip Sloan argues that, by the late 1780s, "Kant has been forced by the controversies with Herder and Forster to weaken the claims of *Naturgeschichte*, and to elevate those of *Naturbeschreibung*" (2006: 640; see Cooper 2017 and McNulty 2022 for alternative interpretations of the impact of those controversies). I disagree. If anything, Kant would double down on his preference for *Naturgeschichte* as the proper way to investigate natural-classificatory differences in the realm of organic beings. This is particularly salient in his final (1788) essay on race, where he explicitly foregrounds the distinction between two conceptions of "history."

[66] A key point of scholarly disagreement is whether Buffon's natural "history" is temporal. See Sloan 1976; Roger 1992; Eddy 1994; Hoquet 2010.

A good place to start is Buffon's "Premier Discours: De la manière d'étudier et de traiter l'histoire naturelle" (1749; "Premier Discours" for short).[67] Buffon begins by noting an obstacle in the study of natural history that comes from the vast quantity and varieties of objects. Alluding to the global data collecting activities that I mentioned in sections 4.1 and 4.2, he remarks:

> when specimens of everything that inhabits the earth have been collected; . . . It seems unimaginable that, even with time, one could come to the point of distinguishing all these different objects, or that one could succeed not only in distinguishing them by their form, but further by knowing all that . . . pertains to the history of each thing in particular. (1976: 145–46)

It is not yet clear what Buffon means by 'history' in this context. What is clear is that he finds it necessary to scrutinize existing taxonomic systems, including Linnaeus's, with respect to their methodologies and presuppositions.

It is impossible, Buffon argues, to construct a single general system, using a single method, for either the whole or a branch of natural history. Insofar as such a system must take everything and divide them into *classes*, *genera*, and *species* in accordance with a chosen principle, the division is inevitably arbitrary. There is a metaphysical impediment here: nature is a *continuum*, as "she passes from one species to another, and often from one genus to another, by imperceptible nuances"; it is therefore impossible to establish sharp boundaries among species, as "the project of a general system" requires (1976: 150). Botany is a case in point: no general system can comprehend all species of plants with "perfection and methodological rigor." The competing systems attempted so far have one thing in common: the botanists have allowed themselves "the freedom . . . of choosing arbitrarily a single feature of plants as a distinguishing characteristic," such as the number and configuration of their leaves, flowers, or stamens. The resulting systems, insofar as they are all founded on such "arbitrary principles" of classification, can only be defective ones that successively destroy one another. In this way, one can never arrive at any "science" of the objects under consideration, but at best "a convention, an arbitrary language, a means of mutual understanding." Worse still, Buffon laments, with the ever-expanding systems of naming, the

[67] Buffon 1749[1]: 3–62 (this refers to volume 1 of Buffon 1749). It is translated as "Initial Discourse: On the Manner of Studying and Writing about Natural History" in Buffon 1976: 145–78. I will refer to this translation while consulting the French original.

technical "scientific terminology" has become a burden on the memory of the students of nature and even "more difficult than science itself" (1976: 150–51; see 154–56, 172).

Buffon's point is not to reject all practices of constructing a descriptive system of classes, genera, and species. His concern is rather about how to do this *well*, in a manner that is conducive to scientific investigations. In his view, "the sole means of constructing an instructive and natural system is to put together whatever is similar and to separate those things which differ." It is just that, unlike past system builders, one should not restrict oneself to "only a single feature" when classifying organisms (plants and animals), but employ "all parts of the organism" and find out "the differences and similarities of complete individual specimens." On that basis, one ascribes individual objects to the same *species* if they "resemble each other exactly, or if the differences between them are so small that they can be perceived only with difficulty." Otherwise, perceptible differences between individuals may lead one to assign them to different species under the same *genus*, or to different genera under the same *class*, and so on (1976: 155).

Thus, while the attempts "to convert everything to a restricted system" are mistaken, Buffon's preferred alternative is not "to have no system at all," an approach that he finds "equally vicious." He is only calling for a different *method*. One ought not, he cautions, "regard as fundamental to science the [artificial] methods . . . concerning natural history" that system makers like Linnaeus have pursued so far. Each of those methods has only resulted in a partial and arbitrary "dictionary in which one may find names arranged according to an order derived from a certain idea." Buffon's "true method," by contrast, involves the "complete description [*description compléte*]" and "exact history [*histoire exacte*]" of each thing "without prejudging things and without an eye to systematization" (1976: 156–57; see 164–66). In spite of the terminological distinction, both "description" and "history" fall under the broader umbrella of "natural history,"[68] considered as a type of "knowledge of facts." Only a comprehensive natural history in this (still Baconian) sense, Buffon argues, can serve as "the source of the other physical sciences" (1976: 159).

When it comes to organisms, "description" and "history" capture different aspects thereof. Description shows "form, size, weight, colors, positions of

[68] Buffon often uses the capitalized expression 'Histoire Naturelle' to refer to the broader notion of natural history. See 1749[1]: 30, for instance, where this is taken to cover both "description" and the lowercase "histoire" in French.

rest and of movement, location of organs, their connections, their shape, their action, and all external functions." History, by contrast, treats "only relations which the things of nature have among themselves and with us." The history of animals, in particular, is "not only the history of the individual but that of the entire species." It includes "the services which they can render to us and all the uses which we can make of them," as well as their relations among themselves, including their conception and birth (*génération*), parental care, habitat, customs, nourishment, hunting, and so on (1976: 160; see 1749[1]: 29–30). It is in these terms that Buffon, in volume 3 of *Histoire Naturelle* (1749), describes all the "varieties of the human species" found around the globe and, on that basis, sorts them into different "races."[69]

### 4.4.2. Mapping Human "Varieties," with Passing Remarks on Slavery

Buffon's differentiation of human varieties builds on a comprehensive and detailed survey of available accounts of human populations in different regions of the earth.[70] The accounts cover two sets of characteristics of each population, roughly corresponding to the "description" and "history" outlined in the "Premier Discours."[71] From the gaze of European travelers, whose reports Buffon relies on, each non-European population appears with certain stature and countenance, strength and agility, facial features (eyes, nose, lips, teeth, and visage), skin color, temperament or disposition, food and its procurement, dwellings, child rearing abilities and practices, customs, and occasionally languages. Buffon locates the various populations in a more complex geographic grid than the Linnaean four-continent model, mainly using latitudes, rivers and seas, mountains and islands, as well as continents, to orient himself. The reader can almost picture Buffon slowly

[69] "Variétés dans l'Espèce Humaine" was originally published in Buffon 1749[3]: 371–530. I am using the pagination of its English translation in Buffon 1812[3]: 302–446. The bracketed number following the year of publication refers to the volume cited.

[70] By 'population,' I am not attributing to Buffon what it is meant in biology today (a group of organisms of the same species that live and interbreed in a given area). I simply mean a group of people inhabiting the same area.

[71] In volume 1 of the first German translation of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, the part called "Natürliche Historie des Menschen" is divided into two sections, entitled "Beschreibung des Menschen" and "Natürliche Geschichte des Menschen" (1750: 242–88). The salient difference between *Beschreibung* and *Geschichte* in these section titles may be intended to reflect Buffon's original distinction between *description* and *histoire*, both of which stand under the broader concept of *Histoire Naturelle* (see note 68 above).

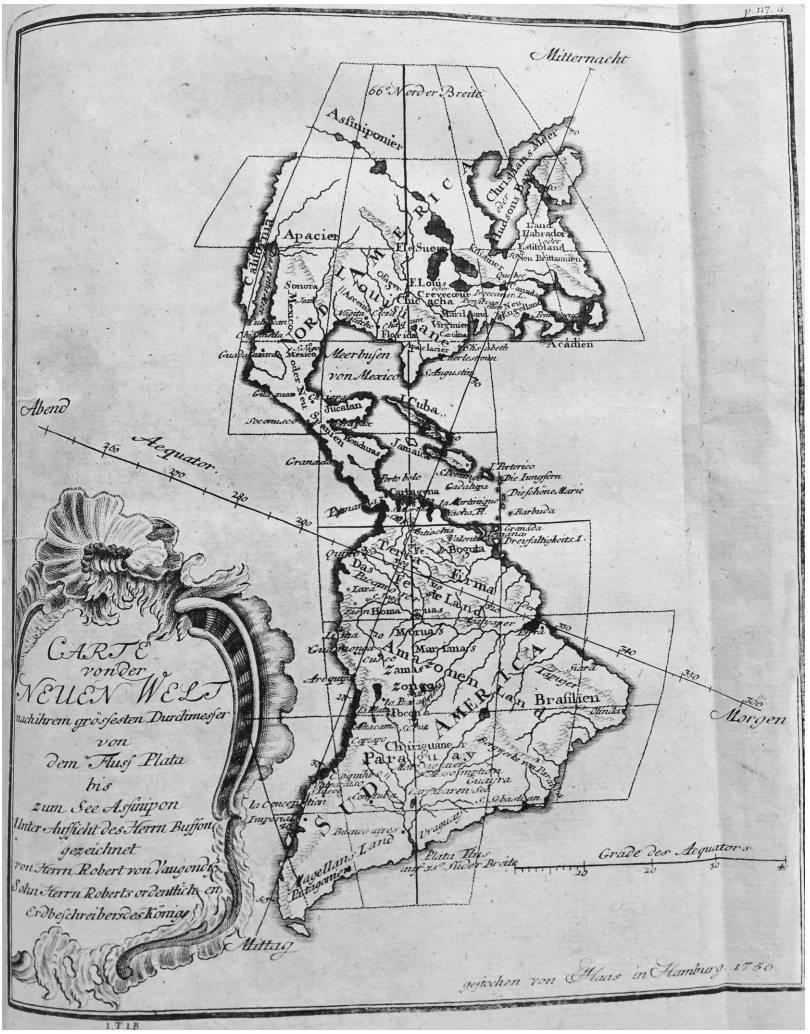



**Figure 4.3.** Map of the New World in Buffon 1750 (page 117.a).

tracing a finger across select world maps as he "survey[s] the surface of the earth" (1812[3]: 302; see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4, which were the maps of the New World and the Old World included in volume 1 of the first German translation of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, published in 1750, and which were likely the maps that Kant would see).

Buffon compares all known human populations under "three heads: 1. The colour; 2. The figure and stature; and, 3. The dispositions" (1812[3]: 302).

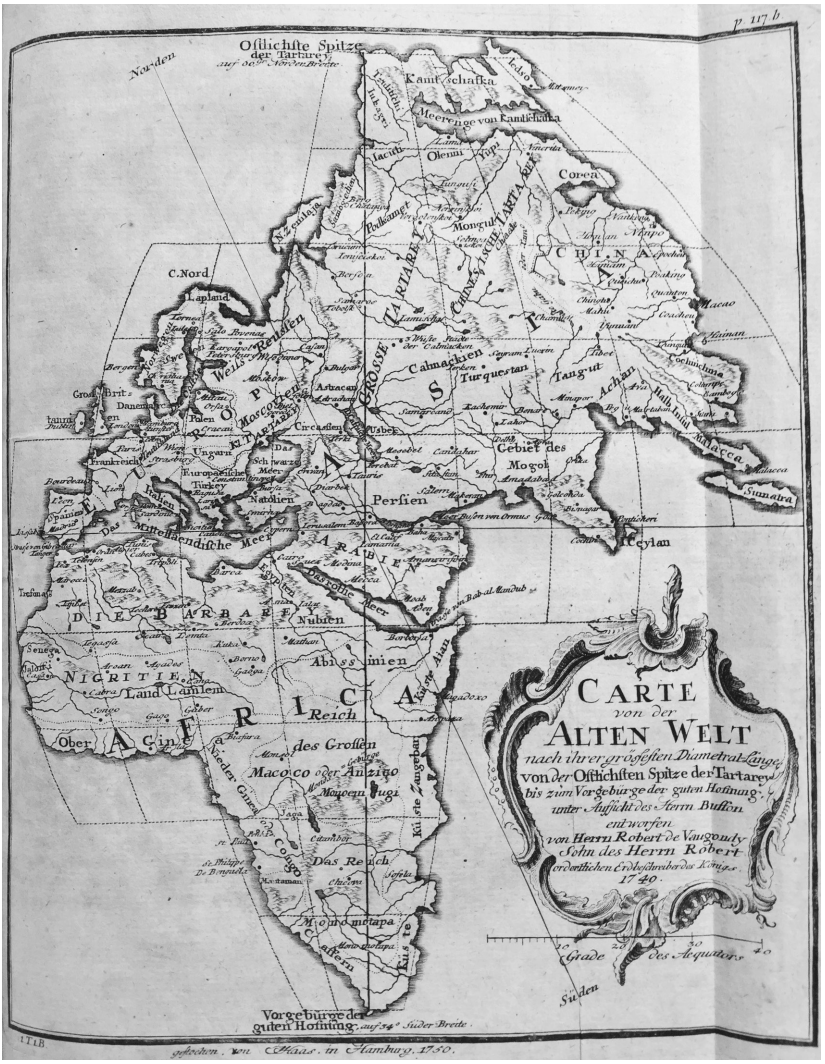



**Figure 4.4.** Map of the Old World in Buffon 1750 (page 117.b).

Some are assigned to the same "race" because they largely *resemble* one another in certain respects.[72] For instance,

[72] A common claim is that Buffon divides all humans into six principal races. There is little textual basis for this claim, however (Bindon 2017). My goal here is not to give an exhaustive account of Buffon's racial division, partly because it is often difficult to tell where, for him, one race ends and another begins.

> the Samoiedes, the Zemblians, the Borandians, the Laplanders, the Greenlanders, and the savages to the north of the Esquimaux, are the same race of men; because they resemble one another in figure, in stature, in colour, in manners, and even in singularity of customs. (1812[3]: 308; see 302–8)

Buffon's description of each race is far from value-neutral. He characterizes peoples in such terms as aesthetic appeal (ugly or beautiful, deformed or well-formed), morality, spirituality, intelligence, and the extent of civilization or, in the case of "savages," the lack thereof.[73] For instance, Buffon assigns several populations to the same race on account of their being "equally gross [in physical form], superstitious, and stupid" (1812[3]: 305). The Japanese and the Chinese, who Buffon assigns to the same race for having similar dispositions, manners, and customs, are said to have a "very ancient" (but since stagnant) civilization thanks to their fertile soil, mild climate, and proximity to the sea (1812[3]: 320–21).[74]

As for the blacks of Africa, Buffon divides them into "two principal races, that of the Negroes, and that of the Caffres," the latter including all East Africans and the "Hottentots" among others.[75] Besides there being many "shades from brown to black" (as many as there are shades "from brown to white" within the white race), the two black races reportedly differ from each other even more greatly in their "features, hair, skin, or smell" and in their "manners and natural dispositions" (1812[3]: 379–80; see 395–400). The "genuine Negroes," located in the Senegal-Gambia region,[76] are

[73] Buffon does not romanticize savagery. He sees this state as antithetical to humanity's destined dominion over nature. Such dominion can only be realized in society: "Man derives all his power from society, which matures his reason, exercises his genius, and unites his force" (1812[4]: 61). Kant holds a similar view, as I have explained in Lu-Adler 2022b.

[74] Elsewhere, Buffon contends that "science neither originated in China nor in India." He regards the Asiatic Indians as the "first enlightened race of men," but claims that they left nothing systematic (only "fragments") and hence no science. Buffon attributes the alleged decline of ancient civilizations like India to external factors, particularly the invasion by barbarians (1812[2]: 329–30). By contrast, as I shall explain in Chapter 6, Kant ascribes the perceived decline or stagnation to an alleged inability on the part of the yellow race to form abstract concepts or principles, which in his view are required for sciences properly so called (including philosophy).

[75] In his 1785 essay on race, Kant excludes "the Kaffirs" from the race of "the *blacks*" or "the *Negroes*" (BBM, 8: 93). In the 1788 essay, he speculates that "the Kaffir and . . . the Hottentots . . . might be nothing but bastard generations of a Negro people with the Arabs, who have been visiting these coasts since the most ancient times" (GTP, 8: 171). On the history of the term 'Caffre' ('Kaffir'), see Arndt 2018, which also points out that the European view of the relation between the "Caffres" and "Hottentots" evolved over time.

[76] Kant also locates "true Negroes" in the same region, called "Senegambia" (VRM, 2: 441–42; see PG, 9: 312; V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 87). His reason is that its air is so "phlogistized" that only those with the blackest skin can survive there (BBM, 8: 103; GTP, 8: 169–70n).

described as "handsome, of a fine stature." Buffon erotizes the women of this race: "abstracting" from their "very black" color, they are just as beautiful as the European women; they are "peculiarly fond of white men" in sexual encounters; and they are "extremely prolific," robust, and efficient in child bearing and rearing (1812[3]: 383–85).[77] All in all, "Negroes" are said to "have little genius" but "extremely acute" feelings (1812[3]: 393). Some of them are described as "exceedingly indolent," though "strong and robust" (1812[3]: 386). We will see Kant making similar claims.

Reflecting his prescription in the "Premier Discours" that the "history" of an animal species ought to include "the services which they can render to us and all the uses which we can make of them" (1976: 160), Buffon contrasts the true "Negroes" and "Hottentots" partly with an eye to their usefulness to potential masters. The "Hottentots," whose skin color can be tawny, olive, or reddish brown, are "a wandering, independent people, frightfully nasty, and extremely jealous of their liberty" and, in a word, "a very singular species of savages" (1812[3]: 395–97).[78] "Negroes," by contrast, are overall "sedentary, love cleanliness, and are easily reconciled to servitude" (1812[3]: 395). More specifically, the "Negroes of Angola" are "preferred, for their strength," the Guineans are "very proper for cultivating the ground and other laborious offices," and the Senegalese, while not as strong, are "easier to discipline," "more capable of learning trades," and "better suited for domestic service." As for the "Creole Negroes," they have inherited from their parents a "spirit of servitude" as well as black skin and are "more spiritual, reasonable [*raisonnables*], and dexterous, only more indolent [*fainéans*] and libertine, than the African Negroes." Such variations aside, all "Negroes" can purportedly "contract an affection to a master," in which case they would do anything "to demonstrate their zeal and attachment" (1812[3]: 391–93, modified translation; see 1749[3]: 466–69).

[77] This claim about black women being extremely prolific is not so eroticizing as debasing, if we read it in light of Buffon's general principle that, in the animal kingdom, the "more contemptible" or less perfect ones are the "more prolific" (1812[2]: 362).

[78] The discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, a South-African headland, by the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias (1450–1500) on the sea route to India in 1487–88 was a monumental event in the history of Europe's global expansions (Gauvin 2000). Among other things, it spawned an abundance of negative reports about the "Hottentots," a derogative reference to the Khoikhoi people (Smith 1993; Merians 2001: 32–86). See Bernasconi 2014 on the extent to which some of those reports—especially Peter Kolb or Pierre Kolbe's (1675–1726) account (Kolb 1731)—might have influenced Buffon's and Kant's (in contrast to Rousseau's) views of "Hottentots." On Kolbe and the transmission of eighteenth-century "knowledge" about the Cape of Good Hope and the Khoikhoi people, see Good 2006; Huigen 2009: 33–58, 241–44; Penn and Delmas 2018.

It is in the context of these remarks about the alleged slave mentality of "Negroes" that Buffon laments their misfortune. He asks rhetorically:

> Is it not more than enough to reduce men to slavery, and to oblige them to labour perpetually, without the capacity of acquiring property? To these, is it necessary to add cruelty, and blows, and to abuse them worse than brutes? (1812[3]: 394)

Alluding to the Code Noir (Black Code) that Louis XIV issued to regulate the practice of racial slavery in the French West-Indian colonies,[79] Buffon praises "the laws [that have] given a friendly check to the brutality of masters, and fixed limits to the sufferings of their slaves." He condemns some slave masters for using "barbarous and diabolical arguments"—for example, the claim that the slaves are equally strong and fit for labor regardless of how little they eat or sleep—to "palliate those oppressions which originate solely from their thirst of gold." This condemnation—as well as the preceding claim that "the unfortunate Negroes are endowed with excellent hearts, and possess the seeds [*germe*] of every human virtue"—rings hollow, though, as Buffon immediately hurries the reader to "abandon those hardened [slave-owning] monsters to perpetual infamy, and return to our subject" (1812[3]: 394).

Obviously, then, Buffon does not value the humanity of "Negroes" enough to denounce the very *institution* of slavery as diabolical. As Louis Sala-Molins perceptively puts it:

> Buffon does not condemn slavery: he feels sorry for the misery of slaves, . . . the principal scourge of slavery is that it endangers the virtue of those who administer it with excessive brutality. By neglecting this duty, by treating "Negroes like animals," the civilized man yields to violence and erects in and around himself—in the progress of the species toward its own perfection—the obstacle that is his own return to a state of barbarism. (2006: 103)

[79] Code Noir 1735: 3–12. The edict was issued in 1685 and registered in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in 1687 (the Code was last edited in 1788, three years before the onset of the Haitian Revolution). Louis Sala-Molins has given the most authoritative, thorough, and devastating analysis of the entire Code, contextualizing each article by drawing on relevant historical, legal, and religious sources. The analysis at the same time invites a meditation on the French Enlightenment philosophers' overall silence about slavery (2018: 4–6; see Sala-Molins 2006). Also see Cohen 1980, which treats the Code as part of colonial France's effort to establish slave societies (35–59), followed by an account of the complicity of the Enlightenment *philosophes* (60–99).

Nor does it dawn on Buffon to consider that he can study the varieties of Africans largely thanks to the slave trade or that the European travelers, whose reports he depends on as testimonial evidence,[80] gazed at Africans with the eye of a master (regardless of whether they personally owned or traded slaves). It was from this perspective that they described "genuine Negroes" in relatively more favorable terms but found "Hottentots" despicable, whose alleged savagery, characterized by a fierce love of liberty and independence, makes them unserviceable to slave masters.

In short, while condemning the evil *slave masters*, Buffon has little to say about *slavery* itself. In this way, he has modeled for Kant how to set aside moral concerns about racial slavery in the name of science. He has done so by suggesting that one can compose a natural history of, and theorize about, human varieties without having to worry about any practical entanglements of this theoretical endeavor. I will return to this point in section 4.4.4.

Resuming the subject of natural history, Buffon deems it "necessary to give as minute a description of the inhabitants of Africa" (and subsequently those of America). Part of the reason is that he needs to test his hypothesis about the "causes . . . in the production" of human varieties. He posits three concurrent causes—climate, food, and manners—but treats climate as the fundamental and primary cause, which in turn influences the other two factors (1812[3]: 374). Alluding to the prolonged debate about the cause of black skin, Buffon remarks that the origin of blacks has been "an object of inquiry." He recognizes that the classical climate theory, according to which "blackness was occasioned by a perpetual exposure to the hot rays of the sun," has been "much weakened" by new geographic discoveries. For instance, it seems to be contradicted by the fact that "blacks transported into more temperate climates lost nothing of their original hue, but communicated it to their descendants" (1812[3]: 405). Buffon's response is to update the climate theory by broadening it to include not only the influence of climate (mainly air and sun) but also the mediating factors of diet and customs. This revised theory has already received some support, Buffon suggests, from his

[80] It is by "comparing the testimonies of travellers" that Buffon finds it necessary to divide the African blacks into two principal races (1812[3]: 379). The "testimonies" on which he bases his descriptions of different varieties of Africans include, among other travel reports, these particularly influential ones: Du Tertre 1667; Labat 1722; Charlevoix 1730; Kolbe 1742; Prévost 1746 (as mentioned in Buffon 1812[3]: 391–97). Regarding the writings on Africa that formed the extended backdrop against which Buffon theorized about Africans, see Curran 2011: 29–73. For a critical analysis of Buffon's (and many other eighteenth-century philosophers') relation to travel literature, see Duchet 1995: 65–136. On the French encounter with Africans through the slave trade and colonization, see Cohen 1980: 1–180; Geggus 2001; Ehrard 2008.

"historical account of all the inhabitants of Europe and Asia": this account shows that differences in skin color depend primarily but not exclusively on climate; the "nature of the food" and "the mode of living" can also have "considerable effects." The main differentia in the latter regard is the degree to which a people is (un)civilized: living under the same climate, "the savage people would be more ugly, more tawny, more diminutive, and more wrinkled, than the nation that enjoyed the advantages of society and civilization" (1812[3]: 372–73).

Now Buffon wants to test this revised climate hypothesis by findings about the New World. The strongest objection to the hypothesis, he notes, is the fact that this part of the Earth, though partly "situated under the same latitude with Senegal" for instance, affords "no examples of true blacks" (we saw Boyle raising a similar objection in section 4.2.2). Buffon proposes to answer the objection by giving a "description of the various American nations" for the sake of "just comparisons" (1812[3]: 407). There are no blacks among the Amerindians because, he surmises, they migrated to America from elsewhere (1812[3]: 410, 433) and are still all too new to this continent.[81] The climates here, which are not as severe or as drastically varied as those in the Old World, have not had enough time to exert any noticeable influence on them (1812[3]: 429–32). There is nevertheless a "great uniformity" among them due to a shared mode of living: "All the Americans were, or still are savages" (1812[3]: 428–29; see 408–18, 423–26, 432–33). When Buffon does care to differentiate them, he does so again in terms of whether a given population is suitable for slavery, in much the same way as he differentiated "Negroes" and "Hottentots" as two races of black Africans. For instance, he describes the Caribs (an indigenous people of South America) as a people who "never can be trained to labour like the Negroes," because they are "extremely indolent" and so fiercely independent that they would do everything to protect their liberty and resist servitude.[82] By contrast, the indigenous Brazilians are said to be more amenable to servitude and, once enslaved, "may be trained to any operation, except that of cultivating the ground" (1812[3]: 417).

[81] The Americans must be a "new people," Buffon speculates, because this continent must be "thinly and recently inhabited" by largely ignorant "savages" when the Europeans arrived and "conquered" it. Otherwise, he figures, the conquering would not have come with so much "facility" (1812[3]: 429–30). To debunk the myth that the Americas were sparsely populated by completely uncivilized natives before the Europeans' arrival, see Mann 2005.

[82] Kant holds a similar view about Amerindians. He portrays them as lazy and untrainable due to a lack of passions and drives, wherefore they belong at the lowest rank of all races (for discussion, see Lu-Adler 2022b). In Chapter 1, I mentioned his denigrating tropes about the "Carib" in particular. I will revisit these tropes in Chapter 5.

Then, alluding to the controversy over pre-Adamism (I mentioned this in section 4.2.2), which was initially meant to explain the peopling of America, Buffon defends a secular form of monogenism. He believes, "independent[ly] of theological considerations," that the Amerindians share the same origin as the Europeans and that different regions of America may have been peopled through migrations or geological separations from the Old World (1812[3]: 433–34). All in all, "mankind are not composed of species essentially different from each other." Instead, "there was originally but one species," which underwent changes "by the influence of climate, food, mode of living, epidemic diseases, and the mixture of dissimilar individuals." Whether these changes give rise to races—understood as *specific* varieties—is a matter of time. What were at first inconspicuous "individual varieties . . . became afterwards specific, because they were rendered more general, more strongly marked, and more permanent, by the continual action of the same causes." These are then "transmitted from generation to generation" (1812[3]: 446).

To illustrate, Buffon explains that, insofar as "The heat of the climate is the chief cause of blackness," *excessive* heat has produced the "perfectly black" variety in West Africa and, from there, the shades become ever lighter as the heat goes from "a little less violent" to "somewhat temperate" and then "altogether temperate." Meanwhile, *extreme* cold produces similar effects as extreme heat does, due to the shared quality of dry air, which makes the skin "very tawny"—as in the case of the "Laplanders," who are "the smallest of the human species" due to the contracting effects of extreme cold. By contrast, the most temperate zone, where the "civilized countries" are situated, "produces the most handsome and beautiful men." It is therefore the place where, Buffon claims, "the ideas of the genuine colour of mankind, and of the various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived" (1812[3]: 443–44). That is, whiteness is "the primitive colour of Nature, which may be varied by climate, by food, and by manners, to yellow, brown, and black" (1812[3]: 422).

Buffon's specific varieties, unlike Kant's races, are not irreversible or *necessarily* hereditary. Rather, they may last only so long as the relevant environmental causes continue to operate in the same way.

> [As the specific varieties] were originally produced by a train of external and accidental causes, and have only been perpetuated by time and the constant operation of these causes, it is probable that they will gradually disappear, or, at least, that they will differ from what they are at present, if the

> causes which produced them should cease, or if their operation should be varied by other circumstances and combinations. (1812[3]: 446)

Take "Negroes," for instance. Although "the rudiments of blackness are communicated to them by their parents," this fact "implies not that the colour will continue the same after many successive generations." Rather, it may be "gradually effaced by the temperature of a cold climate." Thus, Buffon speculates, "if a colony of Negroes were transplanted into a northern province, their descendants of the eighth, tenth, or twelfth generation, would be much fairer, and perhaps as white as the natives of that climate" (1812[3]: 440–41). It is just that the resulting whiteness in this case would have "no resemblance to the original whiteness, because it has been adulterated by the causes which have already been assigned" (1812[3]: 422).

Overall, in this account of human varieties, Buffon is still operating with the Baconian notion of natural history. Such a history serves as the basis both for his conclusions about whether various populations belong to the same or different "races"—namely, *specific* as opposed to individual varieties—and for his speculation about the causes of the differentiating characteristics of each race. In sum, he begins with detailed descriptions of certain populations, compares those descriptions to foreground the ways in which the populations in question resemble or differ from one another in color, bodily form, mode of living, and so on, and thereby determines whether they are of the same race (specific variety). Meanwhile, this descriptive sorting of human varieties gives Buffon the occasion to address the ongoing debates about the cause of the blackness of "Negroes" and the origin of Amerindians, updating and defending the climate hypothesis that previous natural philosophers like Boyle sought to discredit.

As far as Kant is concerned, however, we have yet to encounter the philosophically more interesting aspect of Buffon's work on human differences.

### 4.4.3. Climate, *Moule Interieur*, and Degeneration: Buffon's Scientific Monogenism

I mentioned in section 4.3 that Kant makes a crucial distinction between two notions of natural history, namely between a mere description of nature and a study of natural origins. To disambiguate, Kant suggests, we may use 'physiography' (*Physiographic*), which is another term for physical geography, to

denote the former and 'physiogony' (*Physiogonie*), the latter (GTP, 8: 163n). Already in his first course announcement about physical geography (1757), Kant states that it "merely considers the natural characteristics of the globe and what is on it: the seas, . . . the atmosphere, human beings, . . . and minerals" and that this is done only "with the reasoned curiosity of a traveller who everywhere looks for the noteworthy, . . . compares the observations he has collected, and revises his ideas accordingly." Kant then notes that the "relevant information is scattered in numerous and lengthy works." The numerous works he consults include Buffon's, which contain "fundaments of physical geography" (EACG, 2: 3–4).

This reference to Buffon suggests that Kant regards Buffon's account of human varieties mainly as a descriptive physiography. Thus, although the *word* 'race' appears in it, it is not the *concept* of race he is looking for. The latter figures only in the reasoning of a natural philosopher who "infers from a hereditary particularity of different interbreeding animals . . . a common cause . . . that lies originally in the phylum of the species." Kant deems such a concept "necessary with respect to natural history" *as physiogony* (GTP, 8: 163). Buffon, while asserting that all races or specific varieties of humans must belong to the same species, has so far given no indication of whether or how different races may be *grounded* in or *derived* from a common cause lying in the original human phylum. So he has not yet arrived at a proper concept of race by Kant's standard.

That being said, Kant will find key ingredients for developing his race concept in other parts of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*. The first such ingredient is Buffon's definition of natural or physical species. Kant introduces it at the start of his 1775/77 essay on race:

> *Buffon*'s rule, that animals which produce fertile young with one another (whatever difference in shape there may be) still belong to one and the same physical species, must properly be regarded only as the definition of a natural species [*Naturgattung*] of animals in general in contrast to all school species [*Schulgattungen*] of the latter. (VRM, 2: 429)

Buffon articulates this rule in a chapter about the ass in the fourth volume of *Histoire Naturelle* (1753).[83] To decide whether an ass is only a degenerated

[83] Buffon 1753: 377–403. The chapter is translated in Buffon 1812[4]: 158–86. I will cite the translation.

horse or belongs to a separate species (1812[4]: 159–60), Buffon explains what constitutes a species and the criterion for determining whether two creatures belong to the same or distinct species. A species consists in the individuals that make it—not "the number nor the collection of similar individuals, but the constant succession and renovation of these individuals," individuals that are "endowed with the power of reproduction" (plants and animals). This designation requires that we consider "Nature in the succession of time, and in the constant destruction and renovation of beings." We can therefore get a clear idea of a natural species only by comparing present individuals with *past* ones, not by comparing concurrently existing individuals with one another in terms of their (dis)similarity. If two creatures can mix to produce fertile offspring, they are of the same species. Otherwise, they must be treated as separate species. Therefore, for all their similarities, "as the horse and ass produce only unfertile and vitiated individuals, they are evidently of different species." By contrast, the spaniel and the greyhound, as dissimilar as they are, belong to "the same species, because they produce fertile individuals" (1812[4]: 165–67).

Equipped with this account of *natural species*, Buffon returns to the disputed question about whether all human varieties are of the same species. If previously he merely asserted monogenism to be the case, now he can produce an argument for it.

> If the Negro and the White could not propagate, or if their productions remained barren, they would form two distinct species; . . . if the White were man, the Negro would be a separate animal, like the monkey; . . . But this supposition is contradicted by experience; for, as all the varieties of men are capable of mixing together, and of transmitting the kind, they must necessarily have sprung from the same stock or family. (1812[4]: 169; see 167)

In giving this argument for monogenism, Buffon seems to be suggesting that polygenism necessarily sees "Negroes" as less than human. Polygenism does not entail such a dehumanizing view, however. Nor does Buffon's monogenism entail an equal consideration of different varieties of a given species. He in fact suggests the opposite. Contemplating on the practical implications for treating the ass as a separate species from, not a degenerated variation of, the horse, he remarks:

> It is comparison alone that degrades [the ass]. We view and judge of him, not as he is, but in comparison with the horse. We forget that he is an ass, that he has all the qualities and endowments peculiar to his species; and we contemplate the figure and qualities of the horse, which the ass neither has nor ought to possess. (1812[4]: 171–72)

In other words, the ass gets degraded when it is taken to belong in the same species as the horse, not when it is seen as an entirely different species.

At the same time, however, the "excellent quality" Buffon appreciates most about the ass is strikingly similar to what he attributed to "genuine Negroes," including a "great affection" for and "strong attachment" to the master in spite of being "commonly abused"—in short, a useful disposition toward servitude (1812[4]: 172–73). So it would probably make little *practical* difference to Buffon had he agreed with the view, which he rejects, that "the Negro would be to [the white] man what the ass is to the horse," namely as two distinct species (1812[4]: 169). Either way, "Negroes" would be considered in terms of their usefulness to potential masters. We may also say that Buffon's monogenism—coupled with his view that the European whites are the most civilized and that other varieties are environmentally induced degenerations of the white prototype (to be explained shortly)—can have its own insidious normative implications: nonwhites will always be *degraded by comparison* within such a framework.

Buffon might not be bothered by this observation (as we shall see in section 4.4.4). As a natural philosopher, he is far more interested in meeting the theoretical challenge of defending monogenism on *scientific* grounds. In particular, he needs to explain *how* individuals from the same animal species can develop significantly different features. Before he can answer this question, he needs to clarify what exactly it is asking. Typically, questions about natural phenomena may concern either "primary causes" or "particular effects." Queries of the first kind—when, for instance, "we inquire into the cause of gravity . . . or of any general quality of matter"—are futile "as they exceed the powers of human intellect." Questions of the second kind are those with respect to which "we are always in a condition to give a distinct answer, whenever we can show that these effects are produced by one of the general causes." Yet a third type is a "question of fact," as when one asks "why do trees, dogs, &c., exist?" (as opposed to a *how*-question, about "the manner in which the effect happens"). This kind of question is also "perfectly insolvable," Buffon contends, and those who answer them by invoking

final causes—such as "moral affinity or fitness"—are gravely mistaken: such causes can never become "physical reason[s]" (1812[2]: 375–77).

When we ask how an animal species reproduces its kind (notwithstanding all the variations among the individuals that make up the species), what sort of inquiry must this be in order to suit human intellect? It is a quest for *causal* explanations. One cannot accomplish this just by "giving the history of the generation" of a species through "the most exact observations." For we have thereby "learned the facts only, but have not discovered . . . by what secret cause [nature] enables beings to propagate their kinds." This causal inquiry differs from all three kinds of queries mentioned above. What the natural philosopher is looking for, Buffon stipulates, is a "method of reproduction, depending on primary causes, or which, at least, is not repugnant to them" (1812[2]: 377–78).

This specification of desideratum allows Buffon to rule out certain hypotheses as clearly inadmissible. Referring to explanations that others have proposed, he first rejects hypotheses that assert "mere matters of fact, concerning which it is impossible to reason"—such as the classical theory of preformation, which "supposes the first germ to contain all the germs of the same species," and the view that "every reproduction is a new creation, an immediate effect of the will of the Deity." Also excluded are hypotheses "founded on final causes," such as "that the earth may always be covered with vegetables and peopled with animals." These hypotheses, Buffon reasons, "in place of explaining the effect by physical causes, stand on no other foundation than arbitrary relations and moral affinities." He also cautions against being burdened by "those general axioms . . . so frequently and so injudiciously employed as principles by some philosophers, such as . . . every living creature proceeds from an egg" (1812[2]: 378–79; see 373–75; 410–89).

Buffon's own hypothesis is that there are certain "moulds," by which nature "bestows on bodies both an external and internal figure." He seeks to establish this supposition, particularly the supposition of invisible "moulds for the internal constitutions," by analogy to *gravity*, understood as an active power in nature and a general internal quality (1812[2]: 379–80).[84]

[84] This analogy with gravity appears to be common at the time. When Blumenbach later posited *Bildungstrieb* in place of Buffon's *moule interieur*, he would also add this qualification: the concept designates "not so much the cause as some kind of perpetual and invariably consistent effect, deduced *a posteriori* . . . from the very constancy and universality of phenomena"—much like we use "attraction or gravity to denote certain forces, the *causes* of which however still remain hid" (1865: 194). On the role of Newtonian analogies in the eighteenth-century life sciences, see Wolfe 2014.

> These internal moulds [*moules intérieurs*], though beyond our reach, may be in the possession of Nature, as she endows bodies with gravity, which penetrates every particle of matter. The supposition of internal moulds [is] thus founded on analogy. (1812[2]: 380–81; see 389–90)

Buffon then recommends the standard procedure of hypothesis testing—drawing consequences from the stated supposition, investigating relevant facts, and thereby determining its probability (1812[2]: 382). The details do not concern us here. The upshot is that, insofar as all species of animals (and plants) are composed of "living organic particles" and reproduction is "effected by the union of these organic particles," the reproduction of a species is possible only through an original internal mold. Such a mold is "the efficient cause of the figure of the animal or vegetable, . . . in which the essence, the unity, and the continuation of the species consist, and will invariably continue till the end of time" (1812[2]: 554).

This supposition of *moule interieur* serves as Buffon's basis for showing how a species can remain unaltered qua species, even while the individuals constituting it may develop varying qualities over time. Broadly speaking,

> There is in Nature a general prototype of every species, upon which each individual is modelled, but which seems, in its actual production, to be altered or perfected by circumstances; . . . The first [*premier*] animal, the first horse, for example, has been the external model [*modèle extérieur*] and internal mold [*moule intérieur*], upon which all the horses that have existed, or shall exist, have been formed. . . . What is singular, this model of the beautiful and the good [*bon*], seems to be dispersed all over the earth, a portion of which resides in all climates, and always degenerates, unless united with another portion brought from a distance. (1812[4]: 103–4, modified translation; see Buffon 1753: 215–16)

In the case of the human species, Buffon claims that skin color marks "the greatest alteration that climate has produced" in it (1812[4]: 4). The climatically induced alterations gave rise to "the Negro, the Laplander, and the White," who nevertheless came from the same original prototype: "It is the same identical being who is varnished with black under the Torrid Zone, and tawned and contracted by extreme cold under the Polar Circle"

(1812[4]: 1–2).[85] That is, there is exactly one prototype for the human species, one first human, which contains the *moule interieur* as well as *modele exterieur* of an ideal individual. Different human varieties are only so many degrees of degeneration from that prototype under the influence of climate.

Such degenerations are not irreversible, though. To the contrary, just as any animal species can in principle be perfected by "mixing races . . . or by crossing the breed of different climates" (1812[4]: 104, corresponding to Buffon 1753: 217), so can the human species, having gone through so many degrees of degeneration, be perfected through race mixing. For instance, Buffon surmises, a continued mixing with the blood of the white race suffices to "bleach the skin of a Negro" in about two centuries, although the same effect may be produced "by the influence of climate alone"—by transporting blacks from their native place to a European country (for example, from Senegal to Denmark)—over a much longer period (1812[4]: 3–4, corresponding to Buffon 1766: 313–14).

### 4.4.4. Degeneration and Human Perfectibility: An Entanglement of Theory and Practice

If color is only skin deep or "superficial" (1812[4]: 4), why was Buffon fascinated by the prospect of whitening the supposedly degenerated varieties? Perhaps, while he "had made clear that the classification of certain groups, races, and subspecies was done for the convenience of the observer and had no intrinsic value," this proviso would soon be "forgotten, even by Buffon himself" (Cohen 1980: 214–15). There is no need to assume that he became forgetful, though.

From Buffon's perspective, it remains arbitrary where to draw the line between one human variety and another. What seems more significant to him now is the theoretical breakthrough he has made in *explaining* the phenomenon of variation within any given animal species. He has finally figured out how to account for such a phenomenon by positing an original prototype, which expresses itself in more or less degenerated forms under various circumstances without thereby violating the unity or essential form of the species. It is important to Buffon, as a natural philosopher, to show that

[85] This passage is from the chapter "De la Dégénération de Animaux" in volume 14 of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* (1766: 311–74), translated as "Of the Degeneration of Animals" in Buffon 1812[4]: 1–57.

degeneration happens in accordance with certain *universal laws of nature* that are applicable to animal species in general. This *scientific understanding* of how a natural phenomenon happens can also suggest the possibility of informed human interventions. After all, if X (equatorial climate) is the primary material cause of Y (black skin), one can hope to inhibit the development of Y (at least to some extent) by removing it from the influence of X.

Of course, skin color is at best a perceptually striking human difference (when the white European observer fixes his gaze on very black "Negroes," ignoring the continuum of minute gradations between one color and another). Nonetheless, perusing the often obsessively detailed contemporary travel reports about nonwhite human varieties, Buffon would see everywhere *correlations* between a particular skin color and a whole set of purportedly inferior qualities. His own meticulous account of human varieties reflected this impression. As a natural philosopher bent on uncovering law-governed causal connections, he would find it logical to hypothesize that the supposed degeneracy of a nonwhite skin color comes with other *collateral degeneracies*, as occasioned by the same trio of material conditions (climate, diet, and mode of living).

Now, degeneration presupposes an original model from which it takes place and, as Buffon's inviolable principle, the same animal species must be able to preserve its kind through all forms of degeneration (especially, no human being can degenerate into another animal species).[86] Accordingly, the *moule interieur* that determines the essential form of the species, which at the same time contains the original "model of the beautiful and the good" (quoted in section 4.4.3), must have remained intact through all those degeneracies. Buffon can therefore envision a program of perfecting the human species—as a species capable of perpetuating itself over time in either further degenerated forms or much improved ones—by manipulating its conditions of existence. One—the European man to be precise—can do so by bleaching out "degenerated" nonwhite skins through race mixing, by uprooting and transporting nonwhites to a geographic location "where the inhabitants have generally white skins, golden locks, and blue eyes" (1812[4]: 4), or by "socializing" and "civilizing" them, on the assumption that

[86] Buffon insisted on the discontinuity between humans and nonhuman animals (1766: 43–83, 92–132). On the background debate about the boundaries between humans and other primates (especially orangutans), see Meijer 2004; Niekerk 2004; Sebastiani 2019.

society and civilization (as opposed to savagery) can have a considerable impact on beauty and goodness (1812[3]: 372–73).

Regardless of whether, as Sala-Molins wonders, Buffon has thereby confused "the process of whitening . . . with that of perfectibility," it is not hard to see a troubling entanglement between his scientific account of human varieties and the Enlightenment ideal of human progress. It is easy to bet on the "innocence of perfectibility as the Enlightenment uses it," Sala-Molins remarks sarcastically, as "all one needs to do is to forget the slave trade for a minute, the Black Code, and sugar" (2006: 102–4). When a theory interprets human varieties in terms of law-governed natural degenerations, and when the theorist presents it as the result of a methodic, empirically grounded scientific investigation in a world where his own race enslaves, colonizes, and generally oppresses other, supposedly "degenerated" races, it is difficulty to grant innocence either to his vision of human progress or to his scientific theory of human differences.

> One has to be deaf not to hear, blind not to see the long acts of unreason that perfectibility accompanied, authorized, and imposed from the moment those less favored by nature or climate, geographical latitude or custom, appeared in the discussions of these [Enlightenment thinkers]. (Sala-Molins 2006: 102)

Buffon's authorial intention is not the point here. I only want to emphasize that, to borrow what Cristina Malcolmson said about Boyle's biblical monogenism, Buffon's *scientific* monogenism is also "not the compassionate opposite of polygenesis" (2013: 112). Its theory of degeneration—even though Buffon was talking about the degeneration of humans as purely corporeal beings—now offers a scientific sounding framework for *comparing* and *ranking* all humans by degrees of degeneration, whiteness being the biomarker of superiority and standard of perfection. This can in turn be *used*, by others if not by Buffon himself, to justify Europe's ongoing hegemonic practices around the world.[87]

[87] The relation between Buffon's theory of human varieties and racism is a controversial topic. See Duchet 1995: 229–80 (especially 258–67 on blacks and Amerindians, and 276–80 on the relation between anthropology and history); Curran 2011: 74–116; Doron 2012: 76–77; Vartija 2021: 608–11. I agree that we should avoid "subordinat[ing] the history of 'race' to the history of 'racism', that is, of a polemical concept laden with ideological presuppositions which often remain unclear" (Doron 2012: 76). What I find *more disconcerting*, however, is the fact that the Enlightenment philosophers developed a supposedly scientific theory of "race"—whatever they each meant by this term—without

This observation also helps to put Kant's theory of race in perspective. The latter, as we shall see in section 4.5, has a Buffonian starting point but soon evolves into a much more sophisticated version of scientific monogenism. The increased sophistication has much to do with the distinctively Kantian philosophical innovations I discussed in Chapter 3. The result will be a truly cutting-edge theory of race. At the same time, however, the *theoretical* ingenuity will make Kant's raciology all the more potent in terms of its dangerous *practical* implications. In a way, he will provide a paradigmatic example of how scientific monogenism is no compassionate opposite of polygenism. For instance, he will turn out to be more than manifestly indifferent to racial slavery: as he labors on a groundbreaking scientific theory of race, he will also produce a conceptual framework for granting racial slavery its own place—however transient it may be—in the history of humanity. And his particular brand of monogenism will hold the key.[88]

## 4.5. Going beyond Buffon: Kant on "Race," Monogenesis, and Slavery

### 4.5.1. Kant's *Naturgeschichte* and a New Model of Monogenesis

Kant's indebtedness to Buffon is evident from the fact that he introduces "Buffon's rule" about natural species at the beginning of his 1775/77 essay on race, which will prove pivotal to his argument for monogenism.[89] At

reflecting on its practical implications at a time when their own so-called race practiced the most diabolical forms of exploitation and oppression of other races.

[88] Charles Mills (2014) also highlights the centrality of monogenesis—as opposed to polygenesis—while explaining why Kant was well positioned not only to invent the modern concept of race but also to develop a form of "monogenetic racism."

[89] Kant's reliance on Buffon's rule was a debatable philosophical choice. Blumenbach, who was likewise committed to monogenism, would single out Buffon's rule for criticism in the third (1795) edition of his *De generis humani varietate nativa* (1865: 188–90; on Blumenbach's versus Buffon's arguments for monogenism, see Junker 2019). Like Buffon, Blumenbach explains how different human varieties might have developed from a single original prototype through degenerations under the sustained confluence of climate, diet, and mode of life (1781: 47–105; 1865: 97–129, 190–276). When he stresses the unity of human species in all its varieties, though, he appeals to their *overall similarities* with an "insensible transition" from one variety to another (1865: 275–76; see 234–35, 270–71). Generally speaking, creatures belong to the same species "if they agree so well in form and constitution [*habitu*], that those things in which they do differ may have arisen from degeneration." Otherwise, we assign them to different species if their "essential difference is such as cannot be explained by the known sources of degeneration" (1865: 188).

the same time, Kant's theory of race represents significant departures from Buffon's account of human varieties and theory of generation alike. He already rejected Buffon's supposition of *moule interieur* when, in the "Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God" (1763), he began to take seriously the philosophical challenges posed by the (re)generation of organisms. In that article, he agreed with Buffon that this phenomenon cannot be explained in purely mechanistic terms (I explained this point in Chapter 3). He also shared Buffon's objections to the classical theory of preformation—or, to be more precise, what he would later call individual as opposed to generic preformation (KU, 5: 423–24)—and to the view that treats every generation as a divine creation. He claimed (without argument), however, that the "internal forms proposed by *Buffon* . . . are either as incomprehensible as the thing itself, or they are entirely arbitrary inventions" (BDG, 2: 115).[90]

Kant would also find Buffon's climate hypothesis inadequate for explaining the specific formation of something like black skin, which is hereditary in another climate (even if only for a dozen or so generations). Since this feature is presumably not part of the assumed original human prototype, one would have to show how it could be *added* to the generative power of a specific variety contingently, *through the influence of climate*. Buffon could not make a case for this, Kant would argue. External factors such as "air, sun, and nutrition" can serve as the "occasioning" but not "producing" cause when it comes to characteristics that are inherited necessarily." That is, they "can modify the growth of an animal body but they cannot also provide this change with a generative power that would be capable of reproducing itself" even under altered conditions (VRM, 2: 435).

As I mentioned in section 4.4.3, Buffon treated the *moule interieur*, not climate, as the "efficient cause" of the form of an animal species. This leaves room for saying that climate is only an occasioning cause for its degenerative developments. The truly significant philosophical move on Kant's part is to replace the supposition of *moule interieur* with a modified theory of preformation.

[90] Kant might have already been primed to hold this negative view of Buffon's hypothesis by reading Albrecht von Haller's critical reviews of *Histoire Naturelle* (Schmitt 2019: 239–41, 253–54). On Haller's theory of generation and his reaction to Buffon's, see Roe 1975; Zammito 2018: 131–34. On Buffon's and Haller's joint influence on the transformation of Kant's conception of natural history, see Cooper 2020.

> In the migration and transplanting of animals and plants it creates . . . nothing other than variations [*Abartungen*] and race of the same species the germs and natural predispositions of which have merely developed on occasion in various ways over long periods of time.
>
> . . . we must consider such occasional unfoldings as *preformed*. . . . For nothing foreign to the animal must be able to enter the generative power, which would be capable of gradually removing the creature from its original and essential determination and producing true degenerations [*Ausartungen*] that perpetuate themselves. (VRM, 2: 435, modified translation)

The final sentence of this passage may suggest that Kant rejects Buffon's idea of degeneration as well, especially considering that, as I mentioned in section 4.3 (on Linnaeus), Kant will build this rejection into the very definition of race in his 1788 essay on race (GTP, 8: 163–64). The truth, however, is that he still holds a degenerative notion of race in the 1775/77 essay, albeit one that differs from Buffon's in crucial respects.

To appreciate this point, note that two German terms, 'Abartung' and 'Ausartung,' were used to render Buffon's concept of *dégénération*, with the prefixes *ab-* and *aus-* connoting *origination* and *departure*, respectively (Schmitt 2019: 252–53). Kant gives these terms distinct meanings in his 1775/77 essay. He first contrasts *Abartung* (subspecies) with *Art* (kind): the latter represents a difference in the phyletic origin, whereas the former means that, although some animals diverge from one another in certain hereditary features, they still share the same phyletic origin (*Abstammung*). He then distinguishes *Ausartung* (degeneration) from *Nachartung* (regeneration) as two modes of *Abartung*: while *Nachartung* still agrees with and preserves the original phyletic form (*Stammbildung*), *Ausartung* does not (VRM, 2: 430).[91] Kant then connects the latter concept with race: only the original *Stammbildung* can "degenerate [*ausarten*] into a race";[92] once a race has been established, it will resist all further transformation (*Umformung*) because its

[91] In the *Physical Geography* (the parts based on the notes prepared in the late 1750s and used through the 1770s), Kant refers to degenerations in certain animals (for example, horses) while commenting on the difficult question as to "How the skin is able to acquire so accidental a thing as colour" (PG, 9: 314; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 96; also see the German version of PG, 9: 312, where Kant uses *ausarten* to describe the emergence of the Indian yellow and the Moorish forms).

[92] The term 'ausarten' is replaced with 'abarten' in Girtanner 1796: 12 (also at 24), to reflect Kant's later view that race and degeneration are conceptually incompatible.

character has then become "prevailing in the generative power," so as to reproduce itself (2: 442).

Such is the *true degeneration* that Kant was referring to at the end of the passage quoted above, as that which alone can establish a race. Strictly speaking, nothing new is added through degeneration. Rather, a degenerative feature, insofar as it is to be hereditary, in a way already lies in the original human phylum. It is part of the "hidden inner provisions"—in the form of germs and natural predispositions—that nature has given to the human species to survive in all kinds of climates (VRM, 2: 434). Each degeneration comes down, then, to a specific unfolding or adaptive development of that preformation in a given climate (if a population inhabited there for a sufficiently long period of time). Unlike the degenerative varieties in Buffon's picture, the racial characteristics formed through true degenerations in Kant's system are *irreversible*: they will perpetually and unfailingly regenerate themselves, because the determinate unfolding that established each racial characteristic at the same time "suffocated the other germs" (2: 442; see 2: 436). This was the point that Kant sought to drive home when he emphasized the following: only the original phyletic form can degenerate (*ausarten*) into a race and, once a race has thereby been established, it can only regenerate (*nacharten*) its kin.

Overall, Kant takes himself to be offering an original theory of race and, with it, an original theory of generation in his 1775/77 essay. It is particularly telling that, in a footnote on the distinction between description of nature (*Naturbeschreibung*) and natural history (*Naturgeschichte*) attached to the main section of the essay, he indicates that he does not yet see the latter in Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*.

> *Natural history*, which we still lack almost entirely, would teach us about the changes in . . . (plants and animals) that they have undergone through natural migrations and the resultant subspecies from the prototype of the phyletic species. It would presumably trace a great many of seemingly different kinds to races of the same species and would transform the school system of the description of nature, which is now so extensive, into a physical system for the understanding. (2: 434n; see V-PG/Messina, 26.2: 623–25)[93]

[93] A pathbreaking volume of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* was yet to appear, namely the supplemental volume 5 containing *Des Époques de la Nature* (1778). Kant would recognize this as "the sole work that deals with proper natural history," only to complain that Buffon "let his imagination run wild and therefore wrote more of a novel of nature than a true history [*Geschichte*] of nature" (translated from the anonymous Barth notes of Kant's lectures on physical geography, as quoted in Adickes 1925: 394–95n2).

As Kant explains earlier in the essay, while "a school system for memory . . . only aims at bringing creatures under titles," a physical or "natural system for the understanding . . . aims at bringing them under laws" (2: 429; see Girtanner 1796: 1–4). The latter system, he subsequently adds, must "indicate the ground [*Grund*] for the manifold variations [*Abartungen*]." To this end, "one must venture a *history* of nature, which is a separate science [*Wissenschaft*] and which could gradually advance from opinions to insights [*Einsichten*]" (2: 443).

This reference to "insight" is significant. For Kant, an insight comes with a cognition of the *necessity* of the ground; it must therefore be a cognition a priori, in accordance with certain *universal* concepts and principles.[94] This notion resonates with his distinction between historical and rational cognitions, which I outlined in section 4.1. In these terms, Buffon's account of human varieties is at bottom only a historical cognition (in the objective sense), which is based on a comparative analysis of the relevant data. The boundaries between the principal varieties are arbitrary and inexact. A rational cognition, by contrast, requires that one derive a *systematic* classification of all humans *from a single ground* (as the ground of true unity), in accordance with concepts and principles that reason can establish a priori. Only then can one establish the exact number of principal races with certainty, Kant would add, something that neither Linnaeus nor Buffon could (or intended to) accomplish. As Kant will argue in his 1785 essay on race, "no other number besides [four] can be established with certainty" (BBM, 8: 94)—provided one has precisely determined the concept of *race* (8: 91) and sorted out the methodological problem of how to "make out *a priori* what brings it about that something which does not belong to the essence of the species can be hereditary" (8: 96).

This quest for a *rational* natural history of human races is arguably the most controversial aspect of Kant's theory. As he acknowledges in the 1788 essay while introducing Georg Forster's objections to his approach,

> the famous man right away finds it awkward to establish a *principle* in advance which is supposed to guide the investigator of nature even in *searching* and observing, and especially a principle that would orient observation

[94] Kant gives this account of "insight" in his logic lectures (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 133–36; V-Lo/Dohna, 730–31; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 846).

> toward a *natural history* to be furthered by this procedure, in contrast to a mere *description of nature*. (GTP, 8: 161)

Kant, as we saw in Chapter 3, is poised to defend this rationalist approach with all the intellectual might and ingenuity he has as a committed natural philosopher and to argue, among other things, that "only *methodically* conducted experience" in accordance with "a guiding principle of what to search for" counts as a proper "observation" in natural science (GTP, 8: 161). In so doing, he will also prove to be exceptionally averse to updating his theory in light of new empirical evidence.[95] When he does make fundamental changes to his theory, these are typically driven by a priori philosophical considerations.

A case in point is Kant's attempt to reconceptualize monogenesis, which will eventually lead him to abandon the degeneration model altogether. As we learned from Buffon's discussion of the relation between the ass and the horse, the notion of degeneration was integral to how he conceived monogenesis: either those two animals belong in distinct species (polygenesis), or they are of the same species, the ass being a degenerated horse (monogenesis). Thus, to assign all human varieties to the same species, the talk of degenerations from an original prototype seems inevitable. On the assumption that climate is the primary causal factor in such degenerations, it also seems inevitable to ask about the ideal climate zone, wherein the assumed prototype may be located. Buffon claims:

> The most temperate climate lies between the fortieth and fiftieth degree of latitude [North], . . . It is from this climate that the ideas of the genuine colour of mankind, and of the various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived. . . . The civilized countries, situated under this zone, are Georgia, Circassia, the Ukraine, Turkey in Europe, Hungary, the south of

[95] Here is a case in point. In his 1785 essay on race, Kant made a reference to Philip Carteret's (1733–96) observations about the South Sea Islanders he encountered during his voyage in 1766–69 (reported in Hawkesworth 1773). Carteret wrote that those islanders, referred to as (native) "Indians," were "of a very dark copper colour, nearly black, with woolly heads" (Hawkesworth 1773: 384). Kant mistakenly used this as a testimony about "the *true yellow* of the [Asian] Indian skin color" (BBM, 8: 92). Pointing out Kant's mistakes, Forster suspected that factual accuracy might not even matter to him: "Many hypotheses would have better standing if the ugly blacks could be demonstrated away [*wegdemonstriren ließen*] from the South Sea altogether"; the fact that some blacks were indeed found there would nonetheless be rendered moot in the Kantian system (2013: 150, modified translation). Forster turned out to be right. While admitting that he might have misremembered Carteret's words, Kant would proceed to dismiss *all* data gathered about islanders as *irrelevant* to the question about the development of racial differences: these differences must have been well established in the *continents* before any island was populated (GTP, 8: 177–78).

| | *Phyletic Species* |
|---|---|
| | Whites of brunette color. |
| *First race* | High blondes (Northern Europeans) from humid cold. |
| *Second race* | Copper-reds (Americans) from dry cold. |
| *Third race* | Blacks (Senegambia) from humid heat. |
| *Fourth race* | Olive-yellows (Indians) from dry heat. |

**Figure 4.5.** The racial classification in Kant's first essay on race (1777)..

> Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, and the northern part of Spain. The natives of these territories are the most beautiful people in the world. (1812[3]: 444–45)[96]

Assuming the temperate zone to be "adjacent to the place where [the human being] was originally produced," Buffon takes the alteration (degeneration) from the original prototype to be the slightest here but increases "in proportion as he receded from this station" (1812[4]: 1).

Kant paints a similar picture in the 1777 edition of his first essay on race. He outlines a fourfold racial division that has the same structure as the Linnaean one, but connects the races "with the natural causes of their origin" as well as with the phyletic species (*Stammgattung*) from which they are variously degenerated (Figure 4.5). Although "one cannot hope to find the original human shape [*Gestalt*] unchanged anywhere in the world now," Kant claims that "the region of the earth from the 31st to the 52nd degree of latitude in the ancient world is rightly taken for that region of the earth in which . . . the human being must have diverged the least from his original formation [*Urbildung*]." The reason is that this zone has "the most fortunate mixture of the influences of the colder and hotter regions," making the human being "equally well prepared for all transplantings from there." Regarding the white brunettes found in this zone as closest to the prototype, Kant speculates that "the *high blond* with tender white skin, reddish hair, pale blue eyes seems to be the nearest northern subspecies [*Abartung*]." He is

[96] This demarcation of the temperate zone ostensibly left out England, the southern tip of which starts around 50°N (London is around 51.5°N). The historical background likely mattered: France and England had been battling each other for colonial domination in North America; this conflict would eventually escalate into the Seven Years' War (1756–63) that involved their respective allies as well. Kant's Prussia would ally itself with England and he would move the upper limit of the temperate zone to 52°N.

specifically referring to the northern Germans "in Roman times." The other races presumably represent further divergences from the *Urbildung* (VRM, 2: 440–41; see PG, 9: 311–12).[97]

Kant will no longer associate race with *Ausartung*—true degeneration, a form of *Abartung*—in his 1785 and 1788 essays, however. Instead, he will put all four races on equal footing in terms of their origination from the perspective of *Naturgeschichte*: "even the character of the whites is only the development of one of the original predispositions that together with the others were to be found in that phylum" (BBM, 8: 106). Kant makes this move neither on empirical bases nor from egalitarian considerations. He is only responding to the demands of a philosophically adequate account of what makes something like skin color *unfailingly hereditary*. Defending his updated theory, he argues:

> [1] The present theory, which assumes certain original *germs* in the first and common human phylum which are quite properly *predisposed* to the now present racial differences, is based entirely on the unfailing nature of their heredity, which is confirmed in the four races named through all experience. If someone [2] takes this ground of explanation to be unnecessary multiplication of principles in natural history and [3] believes one could just as well dispense with those special natural predispositions and, while assuming the first parental phylum [*Elternstamm*] to be white, explain the remaining so-called races from the subsequent impressions that happened to the later descendants through air and sun, then he has not proven anything yet. (BBM, 8: 101)

Sentence [1] sharpens the explanandum and elevates skin color, which Buffon treated as one of the many features that differentiated human varieties, to being the characteristic that poses a *unique* challenge to the investigator of nature. This characteristic, "insignificant as it may appear, is universally and *unfailingly* hereditary within its class as well as in the mixing with one of the three remaining classes [i.e., races]" (8: 95–96). This phenomenon is comprehensible, Kant argues, "only if one assumes that the predispositions to all this classificatory difference must have lain necessarily in the germs of a single first phylum, so that the latter would be suitable for the gradual population

[97] This early version of Kant's theory of race was later highlighted in the entry "Race" in the encyclopedic dictionary Mellin 1802 (741–57, especially 753–54). For Kant's conception of a human prototype or archetype (*Urbild*) in the 1770s, see V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 47, 50–51.

of the different regions of the world." In short, all four basic skin colors must be "derived [*abgeleitet*] from the necessary first predisposition in the phyletic species" (8: 98–99), as the effects of certain adaptive responses to four radically different climates (I explained what Kant takes to be the underlying natural, law-governed mechanisms in Chapter 3).

Kant already introduced the key ingredients of this theory in his 1775/77 essay. Clause [3] in the quoted passage suggests, however, that he now sees it as incompatible with the supposition of a white original phylum, from which all subsequent color variations are derived through the mediating influence of different climates. Kant rejects this supposition for its explanatory inadequacy: it "has not proven anything yet." Meanwhile, he continues to dismiss polygenism as unsound (BBM, 8: 102; see VRM, 2: 440). The only philosophically viable alternative, then, is monogenesis-sans-degeneration. This conclusion leaves Kant with two tasks. The first is suggested by clause [2] in the passage quoted above: he needs to defend his theory against certain methodological challenges. In particular, he needs to affirm that his chosen "maxim of reason," that nature always preserves itself, can override the otherwise correct maxim that one should not unnecessarily multiply explanatory principles (BBM, 8: 96–97). The affirmation of this maxim will in turn give Kant a deeper philosophical reason to distinguish race from degeneration (*Ausartung*): the latter is "contrary to the law of nature (in the preservation of its kind in unchangeable form)" (GTP, 8: 164).

The second task is to specify an alternative to degeneration that can explain how "the unity of the generative power," in which consists the unity of humanity as a natural species, can develop into various lasting races in different climates (VRM, 2: 429–30; see GTP, 8: 177–78). If, strictly speaking, no alteration can be made to the assumed original generative power *from without*, either through artificial human interventions or by climatic factors (BBM, 8: 97), then Kant must give an account of how the same human phylum can develop into different races *from within* through adaptive responses to various climatic conditions.

In Chapter 3, I explained how Kant addressed these tasks in a way that reflected his long-standing but also—largely in response to criticisms of his view—ever more fine-tuned commitments as a natural philosopher. I emphasized that he adopted the theory of generic preformation or epigenesis primarily on account of its ability to explain the ability of a species to adapt in different climates and thereby acquire hereditary *differences*, particularly the persistently hereditary ones. This theoretical move is sharpened

and further clarified in Kant's 1785 and 1788 essays on race, the theoretical underpinnings of which are in turn solidified in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* of 1790 (I explained this in section 3.7 in Chapter 3). The result is an entirely new model of monogenesis, namely monogenesis-sans-degeneration ("Kantian monogenism" for short). With this version of monogenism, Kant has reinterpreted the unity of a species, which consists in there being a single original phylum, *for the sake of best explaining hereditary differences*, namely as the effects of climatically induced adaptations under the predetermining constraints of certain germs and natural dispositions posited in the assumed phylum. In other words, such differences emerged because the germs and natural predispositions in the original phylum were destined to develop in such and such ways as the species adapted and preserved itself under different material conditions.

This observation, as I shall explain next, also holds the key to understanding why Kantian monogenism is *not* any better than the degeneration model in promoting a more favorable consideration of nonwhite races. If anything, it has laid an even more solid ground for racism (understood in terms of race-based exclusions from moral respect among other goods), especially when we combine it with Kant's teleological view of human history.

### 4.5.2. Kantian Monogenism, Human Progress, and Racial Slavery

At the end of Chapter 3, I mentioned Kant's response to George Forster's suggestion of a "second transplanting." Forster's suggestion resembles Buffon's speculation, described in section 4.4.3 above, that a black population from Senegal would become ever lighter in Denmark under the sustained influence of the new climate without mixing with other races. This scenario, which is neither a priori impossible nor definitively falsified by experience, contradicts Kant's pivotal assumption that skin color is *unfailingly* hereditary and is therefore a *racial* characteristic (as opposed to a mere variety).

In response, Kant first complains that, by suggesting it may take an indefinitely long period of time for second transplanting to show any discernible effect, Forster has imposed an unfair burden on the *Naturforscher*, who cannot afford to wait forever to ascertain his hypothesis (GTP, 8: 172). Then, to support his view that nature hinders any further transformation of an already acclimatized characteristic, Kant claims that the "Creole *Negroes*"

and the "*Indians* under the name of the gypsies,"[98] even after living in an altered climate for generations, still have not brought about a change "in their progeny" that would make them fit for the new climate. Citing the testimony about "freed Negroes" by the anti-abolitionist merchant James Tobin (against the abolitionist Reverend James Ramsay),[99] Kant speculates that the lack of an "immediate drive [*Trieb*] to activity" in these "Negroes," which was caused by the far lesser needs in their native climate, must have been so interwoven with their natural predispositions that it "extinguishes just as little as the externally visible [black skin]" in the new climate (GTP, 8: 174, including the footnote).

What is most intriguing in this exchange is that, while Forster ended his essay with impassioned remarks about the cruelty of racial slavery, we would not know this fact if we read only Kant's side of the exchange. Forster wanted to know: is Kant's monogenism any better than polygenism in preventing or lessening the atrocities of slavery? Has "the thought that blacks are our brothers" (according to monogenism), Forster asked rhetorically, "ever, anywhere, even once, caused the raised whip of the slave driver to be lowered" (2013: 165)? Kant's response is to avoid commenting on the morality of slavery and to insist on the *Naturforscher*'s purely theoretical standpoint instead. Why? Is it because he does not care enough about the fate of slaves at least to second Forster's implicit condemnation of the slave driver's cruelty (if not to reject the very institution of slavery)? We have no clear answer to this question, because we cannot know what is in his heart. We can nevertheless see how, given the racial characteristics he consistently ascribes to "Negroes," he can *make sense* of their enslavement as part of the (European) civilizational phase of human history (even though he may also deem it immoral in itself).

To explain, let me begin by noting that Kant has always suspected a *correlation* between skin color and certain other characteristics. In the "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764), we find

[98] For a historically contextualized analysis of Kant's views on the "Gypsies," see Hund 2011: 82–55.

[99] The Ramsay-Tobin controversy represented a turning point in the British debate over slavery (Swaminathan 2016; on the broader context, see Oldfield 1998). Kant relied on the abbreviated German translations of their competing tracts (Ramsay 1784 and Tobin 1785) published in volume 5 of the *Beiträge zur Völker und Länderkunde* (Sprengel 1786: 1–74, 267–92), edited by the geographer and historian Matthias Christian Sprengel (1746–1803). Sprengel himself lectured and published on the history of slavery and was evidently interested in exposing his German readers to the abolitionist ideas (Zhang 2017). For a rich account of the nuanced German-language discourse about slavery and the slave trade in the late eighteenth through early nineteenth centuries, see Oduro-Opuni 2020 (especially 155–62 on Sprengel).

the oft-cited example of him treating someone's being "completely black from head to foot [as] a distinct proof that what he said was stupid" (GSE, 2: 255). Whatever he attributes to "Negroes of Africa," he claims that they have it "by nature," as exemplified by the "hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries" (2: 253). The flip side of low intelligence is animalistic excellence: "people of the tropics" are portrayed as physically robust, athletic, and exhibiting acute senses (PG, 9: 316; see V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 93–94; V-PG/Kaehler 26.2: 514–15). Kant also has something to say about the "savages . . . of North America," who will come to represent the red race in his racial classification: an "exceptional lack of feeling"—particularly "feeling for the beautiful in the moral sense"—is "the mark of these kinds of human beings [*Menschengattungen*]" (GSE, 2: 253–54).[100]

Kant brings all these claims together in his first race essay, now in causal terms: the tropical climate not only occasions the black skin but also favors "the robust growth of animals in general"; the latter "results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple"; furthermore, the far lesser needs in that climate—thanks to nature's "abundant provision"—makes him "lazy, soft and trifling" (VRM, 2: 438). Likewise, the same material conditions that are responsible for the physical formation of Amerindians also explain, Kant claims, why their "natural disposition . . . betrays a half extinguished life power [*Lebenskraft*]." This disposition in turn supposedly explains why the "red slaves (Americans)" in the Dutch colony Surinam, for example, are used only for domestic labors: unlike the "Negro" slaves, they generally lack power and endurance and so are "too weak for field labor" (VRM, 2: 437–38, including the footnote).

On the surface, such remarks about "Negroes" and Amerindians simply echo what Buffon, who was in turn channeling the copious travel literature he cited, said about these human varieties. According to Buffon, as I noted in section 4.4.2, while the "Creole Negroes" are characteristically dexterous and fit for servitude albeit also indolent and libertine, the "savages" of America are indolent to the extreme, so that they can at best be kept for domestic service but not "trained" to labor in the field "like the Negroes." This superficial

[100] Kant's remark that American "savages" lack morally conducive feelings is significant, given his view of phlegmatic temperament at this point. He associates phlegm with "a greater lack of moral feeling" and even a lack of "the cruder incentives, such as lust for money," that are needed to "drive indolent human nature to actions for the common weal" (GSE, 2: 218–19). While Kant later would exalt "fortunate phlegm (in the moral sense)" (Anth, 7: 254) and ascribe it to "people capable of the highest culture" (7: 318), he would hold fast to his view that Amerindians embody the unfortunate "phlegm as weakness" marked by insensitivity and lack of drives (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1166).

similarity aside, there is a profound difference between the Kantian "race" and the Buffonian "variety": while the latter is an accident of nature that can be transformed again under the enduring influence of an altered environment, the Kantian-racial characteristics resist any such second transformation once they have been established in the native climate of a race.

Granted, in his essays on race Kant claims that skin color is the only unfailingly hereditary characteristic, wherefore it alone can be used for a racial *classification*. But the resulting classificatory system also gives him a place to pin the antecedently opined correlations between skin color and such other characteristics as temperament. Moreover, the teleological-mechanical *mode of explanation* that he has worked so hard to articulate, defend, and refine, as I detailed in Chapter 3, must seem increasingly compelling to him, so that he can confidently extend it to other phenomena by analogy. Why have the "freed Negroes" all become drifters (*Umtreiber*),[101] for example, according to the "knowledgeable man" James Tobin? Well, Kant surmises, since the temperament of "Negroes" has by all appearances remained unchanged from their African motherland to the New World plantations, and since external factors alone cannot explain this phenomenon, it must be because the temperament has been formed in the equatorial tropics *along with* the black skin, *interwoven* with the latter, together *incorporated into the generative power* of the "Negro" race, wherefore it resists any further transformation in the new environment (GTP, 8: 174n).

Theoretical disagreements can have practical implications, especially when they involve human beings. Buffon's belief in the malleability of human varieties, as we saw, led him to entertain the idea of moving some blacks from Senegal to Denmark to see how long it would take for their skin to whiten under the constant influence of the new climate. What practice would Kant sanction in light of his view that racial characteristics, once established, resist all further transformations? To answer this question, it may be instructive to begin with the following passage from the 1777 edition of his first race essay.

> M. de Maupertuis [thought] of raising in some province a naturally noble sort of human beings in which understanding, excellence and integrity

[101] The German *Umtreiber* has the connotation of unruliness and aimlessness. Kant's choice of this word suggests that he sees "Negroes" as incapable of setting ends for themselves or acting from laws. This is another way of saying that they are suited *only* to serve others, to receive orders from masters, and to be driven by external forces. I thank Bennett McNulty for this observation.

> would be hereditary.[102] In my opinion, this plan, while being in itself feasible, is just as well prevented by a wiser Nature because the great incentives [*Triebfedern*] which set into play the sleeping powers [*Kräfte*] of humanity and compel it to develop [*entwickeln*] all its talents and to come nearer to the perfection of their destiny [*Bestimmung*], lie precisely in the intermingling of the evil with the good. (VRM, 2: 431)

In short, while granting the feasibility of Maupertuis's thought experiment, Kant finds it unwise in the grand scheme of things. If all humans, insofar as they have come from the same original phylum, possess the germs (*Keime*) for perfection, the question is by what naturally endowed driving forces (*Triebfedern*) such germs may be developed toward the destined perfection. This question resonates with Kant's aforementioned claims that Amerindians have naturally weak life power (*Lebenskraft*) and that the "Creole Negroes" are deficient in the immediate drive (*Trieb*) to activity. This resonance is not accidental.

To see why, consider Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (1784). This important essay considers "what meets the eye in individual subjects as confused and irregular yet in *the whole species* can be recognized as a steadily progressing though slow development of its original predispositions" (IaG, 8: 17, emphasis added). This focus on humans as a "species," as opposed to individuals, is immensely significant. To use the terminology of his race essays, Kant is talking about natural species (*Naturgattung*), as opposed to school species (*Schulgattungen*). The latter is a product of logical abstraction (I explained this in Chapter 1). In this case, the species concept refers to the sum of all individuals that fall under it; accordingly, whatever is true of the concept is necessarily true of each one of those individuals. Natural species, by contrast, consists in a unified *history* of *generations*, not an aggregate of coexisting individuals. So what is true of the species may not be true of the individuals. In particular, if "All natural predispositions of [the human being] are determined sometime to develop themselves completely and purposively," this complete development can be realized "only in the species, but not in the individual" (8: 18).

[102] Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759) was, among other important accomplishments, the president (1746–53) of what is now known as the Berlin Academy under the reign of Frederick II of Prussia or "Frederick the Great" (1712–86). He, along with Buffon and other French naturalists, also played a key role in the debates about generation in life sciences, with a special attention to the phenomenon of intergenerational heredity. On Maupertuis's theory of generation, see Wolfe 2010; Zammitto 2018: 99–101, 122–31.

Nature brings about such development, Kant surmises, by means of "the unsociable sociability of human beings," which combines a "propensity to enter into society" with "a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society." It is this resistance, he claims, that "awakens all the powers [*Kräfte*] of the human being, brings him to overcome his propensity to indolence, and, driven by ambition, tyranny, and greed, to obtain for himself a rank among his fellows" (8: 20–21). To illustrate the necessity of having the qualities of unsociability that give rise to the requisite resistance, even if they are "not at all amiable in themselves," Kant describes a scenario without them:

> all talents would, in an arcadian pastoral life of perfect concord, contentment and mutual love, remain eternally hidden in their germs [*Keimen*]; human beings, as good-natured as the sheep they tended, would give their existence hardly any greater worth than that of their domesticated beasts; they would not fill the void in creation in regard to their end as rational nature. (8: 21)

So thanks be to nature for all those spiteful qualities of unsociability, including "the insatiable desire to possess or even to dominate" (8: 21)! Such is Kant's perspective as a disinterested "philosopher—who, regarding human beings and their play in the large, cannot at all presuppose any rational *aim of theirs*": he only wants to see if he can "discover an *aim of nature* in this nonsensical course of things human" (8: 18).

From this perspective of a Kantian philosophical historian, the kind of society that Maupertuis envisioned would actually hinder the overall progress of humanity. So would a state of existence where one is content with little needs, no more than are required for sustenance. Kant portrays and dismisses such a state in the second of his two reviews, published in 1785, of Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–85).[103] Speaking of the "happy inhabitants of Tahiti . . . in their tranquil indolence," Kant asks rhetorically: why do such human beings exist at all, who are "happy merely enjoying themselves" (RezHerder, 8: 65)? Similarly, in

[103] Kant published two separate reviews of the first two volumes of Herder's *Idean* (1784–85, translated in Herder 1966) in 1785, before publishing his second essay on race. For analyses of Kant's reviews that bear on my discussion in this chapter, see Zammito 1992: 180–88, 203–13; Lord 2009; Zuckert 2014.

the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785),[104] he uses the imagery of "South Sea Islanders" to illustrate people who "let [their] talents rust" as they devote their lives "merely to idleness, amusement, procreation—in a word, to enjoyment" (GMS, 4: 423; see MAM, 8: 122–23; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1422).

If, as Mark Larrimore has argued, Kant thereby "conceived of [at least some of] the (nonwhite) races as an unsalvageable waste, a mistake, meaningless in the grand teleological scheme of things" (Larrimore 2008: 118),[105] what solution would he recommend? Leave them alone? After all, "a nature could indeed always subsist" even if everyone on earth lived this way (GMS, 4: 423). Or let them be "visited by more cultured [European] nations" (RezHerder, 8: 65)? If this visitation entails race mixing in the Buffonian sense, Kant would oppose it for the reason that mixing stocks [*Stämme*] "by extensive conquests" to eventually wipe out (*auslöschen*) their characters, while some may see it as a matter of "philanthropy," is "not beneficial to the human race" (Anth, 7: 320; see VSF, 23: 456). If the visitation is only meant to have the races melt together (*zusammenschmelzen*) in the metaphorical senses, without literally interbreeding with one another, Kant would still oppose it. For this could only degrade the white race, as nonwhites would not adopt the European morals or manners (V-Anth/Dohna, ms.353).[106] After all, acculturation cannot be imposed from without, but must be developed from within, the subjects. This development in turn presupposes certain inner drives (*Triebfedern*), which Kant takes the Islanders and Amerindians to lack. This lack renders them *incapable* of any culture even if "there is enough of it as example and encouragement nearby" (GTP, 8: 176). That is, while they "may be in the service of Europeans for a long time, they can never grow accustomed to the European way of life" (Päd, 9: 442). Kant thereby undermines a then-common justification for colonizing the "savages" (such as "the American Indians, the Hottentots and the inhabitants of New Holland"), namely to civilize them. It is not because he rejects the claim that these human beings are in a state of savagery with whom there is "no prospect of a civil union" or the claim of "[white] superiority." It is because the

[104] Kant published the *Groundwork*, his first and most influential publication on moral philosophy, not long after his Herder reviews. The timing suggests that the publication might be directly prompted by Herder's *Ideen* (Ameriks 2012: 221–37).

[105] I added the modifying phrase 'at least some of' to correct Larrimore's indiscriminate treatment of all nonwhites. We shall see that there are consequential differences in how Kant characterizes each of the nonwhite races.

[106] The Dohna-Wundlacken manuscript of Kant's anthropology lectures in the winter semester 1791/92 is reproduced in Kowalewski 1924: 71–373. I am referring to the manuscript (ms.) page numbers specified in this reproduction.

justification cannot be universalized without thereby "sanction[ing] any means to good ends" (MS, 6: 266).

There is yet another possibility: the (near) extinction of (at least some) nonwhite races. Kant entertains this possibility both in private and in public. He writes in one of the *Reflexionen* on anthropology dated to 1780–89: all races will be wiped out (*ausgerottet*) except for the whites (R1520 [1780–89], 15: 878).[107] This is not to promote genocide, Kant would be quick to add. Speaking of Amerindians, he tells his students:

> even [after the Europeans have discovered America] they will attain to no perfection, for it appears that they will all be exterminated [*ausgerottet*], not through acts of murder, for that would be gruesome! but rather that they will die out [*aussterben*]. (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 840)

Kant has his reasons for thinking that, with time, Amerindians will simply disappear or diminish to an insignificant number. Besides the increased chance of "internal struggles" between the natives after the Europeans have "take[n] so much away from them" (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 840), which will presumably lead to some form of self-destruction, there is also the alleged weakness of their life force. South Americans are so weak, Kant claims for instance, that "even the[ir] sexual drive is weak" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1166). This may be why he asserts that "another life"—biological continuation—cannot be "inferred with much certainty" from this race than it can be from the white race (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 840). Kant seems to reaffirm this dim outlook in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). Arguing that the abundance of natural products depends on there being "a [civil] state and an orderly, powerful government" as opposed to "a state of nature," he claims: "the human population . . . can only be small . . . in the American wilderness, even if we attribute to these people the greatest industry (which they do not have)." In their state of nature, he reasons, this people are "always in danger of being laid waste by men or by wild and predatory beasts" and can therefore only maintain a scarce number (MS, 6: 345).

Regardless of whether Kant takes seriously the conjecture about the eventual extinction of (some) nonwhite races, he at least thinks enough of it to divulge it in front of his students. In a way, he is compelled to figure out how

[107] For discussions of this claim as well as the above-quoted passage about the Tahitians, see Bernasconi 2005; Harfouch 2018: 105–56.

to locate each race in the history of humanity now that he has established, with so much philosophical vigor, a rigid racial classificatory system that reduces all humans to four principal races. This is largely because, much as Linnaeus broadened his fourfold division of human varieties from one that was based merely on skin color to one that included such other features as temperament, so does Kant. Although he uses skin color as the sole basis for establishing the initial racial classification, this classification in turn provides the scaffold for constructing more fleshed-out racial profiles.

Unlike Buffon, Kant does not place the races on a sliding scale of various degrees of perfection. Rather, he suggests that there is an unbridgeable and indelible difference from one race to the other.[108] Here is a rough sketch of his four racial profiles.

1. Amerindians have no driving force (*Triebfeder*), no affects or passions, and no worry about anything. They love freedom, which however comes down to mere lazy independence (*faule Unabhängigkeit*). As a result, they acquire no culture.
2. "Negroes" are full of affects and passions. Being sensitive and "afraid of beatings," they can be trained (*abrichten*). This allows them to acquire a "culture of slaves" but no more.
3. Asiatic Indians have driving forces, but no ability for abstract thoughts. Accordingly, they can acquire a culture of art (*Kunst*), but no science (*Wissenschaft*) or enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). They have come to a standstill.
4. Whites possess all the driving forces, talents, and so on that are needed for the most advanced culture. They alone can continue to progress in perfecting themselves.[109]

[108] This point connects with my critique, in Chapter 2, of the common tendency in the discourse on Kant's raciology to treat hierarchism as the defining feature of "racism." I do not deny that one can find forms of racial hierarchism in Kant's work (it all depends on how one interprets 'hierarchy,' which as I pointed out in Chapter 2 has no clearly shared meaning in the secondary literature). My point is rather that the assumption of practically relevant racial *differences* suffices to ground Kantian racism (understood in terms of race-based exclusions). This also better captures the development of Kant's raciology in the 1780s, as he firmly moved away from Buffon's degeneration model of monogenesis. As Inder Marwah (2019: 102–4) has noted, if Kant subscribed to an explicit "racial hierarchy based on proximity to the original human form" in his first race essay (see Figure 4.5), he abandoned it for a more sophisticated raciology in the 1780s. The latter is embedded in Kant's teleological conception of both nature and human history, the complexity of which can hardly be captured by the notion of a hierarchy.

[109] V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1187; R1520 (1780–89), 15: 877–78. Also see V-Anth/Parow, 25: 450–51; V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 843; V-Anth/Dohna, ms.350–53; V-PG/Hesse, 26.2: 119–23; V-PG/Dönhoff, 26.2: 900–901, 907–8. I will discuss the implications of Kant's claim about the third race, represented by Asiatic Indians, in Chapter 6.

This system of racial profiles is the basis for understanding why, as I already explained in Chapter 1, "Kant's racism" is *not* "curiously at odds with his universal *Keime* theory" (Wilson 2014: 205). While he grants the same *Keime* to all races on account of their shared human phylum (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 694), he also holds that those germs can only be developed under specific conditions. To the extent that the conditions are, in his view, unequally distributed across the races, so will be the extent of development.

Kant's basic theory of race, as I presented it in section 4.5.1, has provided the perfect template for deriving this racially unequal outcome. As I summarized his position at the end of that section, he posited germs and natural predispositions in the original human phylum only to show how they allowed the species, as a natural species of organic beings, to split into four principal races while adapting to four climates. Analogously, he posits certain germs in the human being as an earthbound "animal endowed with the *capacity of reason*" or *animal rationabile* only to focus on uncovering the conditions under which they are to be developed and perfected, whereby the human being eventually becomes a "rational animal" or *animal rationale* (Anth, 7: 321–22; see my discussion of this proposition in Chapter 1). The basic conditions, as Kant sees them, include internal as well as external ones (for example, a peaceful and well-governed society). The internal ones include *Triebfedern*, certain affects and passions, and various talents, including the ability to form abstract thoughts. According to the racial profiles sketched above, the white race alone is blessed with all these conditions, whereas each of the other races lacks one or more of them. Kant can then locate the races along the arc of a developmental human history accordingly, making it clear that only the white race will continue to progress toward humanity's final (moral) destiny.

Interrogating Kant's approach to the *racial* or race-based chattel slavery that was practiced at the time can further clarify this point.[110] One possibility

[110] I emphasize "racial" slavery to highlight the fact that there are different forms of slavery and that Kant's occasional remarks about slavery often have nothing to do with the racial slavery practiced in his day. As I have explained in Lu-Adler 2022c, most commentators have overlooked this important fact (especially Kleingeld 2007). See Cugoano 1999: 34–38, for an incisive account of the fundamental differences between ancient forms of slavery and modern racial slavery. Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (c.1757–1791/92, also known as John Stuart) was a formerly enslaved African British author. His *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery* was originally published in 1787, which was a spirited, philosophically rigorous, and rhetorically masterful indictment of racial slavery. Among other things, Cugoano critically engaged with the Ramsay-Tobin controversy I mentioned earlier (see note 99). Whereas Kant spoke approvingly of Tobin as a witness of the behaviors of freed former slaves, Cugoano forcefully invalidated the latter's anti-abolitionist arguments (1999: 18–22).

is that he sees racial slavery as an inevitable albeit transitory part of the (European) civilizational phase of history, *even if* he deems it immoral in itself.[111] We can register this possibility in how he characterizes "Negroes."[112] He portrays them as naturally fit to serve as productive slaves: being "strong, fleshy, supple" (VRM, 2: 438), they have the robust animalistic physique to endure a life of toil in the fields; if the ample provision of their tropical motherland at the same time made them "lazy" (2: 438) and naturally disinclined to work, their sensitive temperament nonetheless makes them susceptible to *training* (to tame their animality).[113] That is, if they lack an "immediate drive to activity" (GTP, 8: 174n), they can nevertheless be *driven* to toil in the fields of sugar plantations (VRM, 2: 438n). Meanwhile, Kant attributes no further abilities or inner drives to this race to think, as some of his contemporaries did, that slavery would help to improve or civilize this race. What other option can he see, as someone preoccupied with the species-bound progress of humanity?[114]

What about, one may ask, Kant's criticisms of how racial slavery and the associated slave trade were practiced in the 1790s?[115] According to Pauline Kleingeld, those criticisms suggest that Kant belatedly but "categorically and repeatedly condemns chattel slavery" (2007: 587–88). If we take a closer look at the relevant texts and contextualize them, however, Kant is evidently

[111] For a similar suggestion, see McCarthy 2009: 62–64.

[112] Although Kant mentions the use of both Amerindians and "Negroes" as slaves in some plantation colonies, he obviously thinks that the latter are better suited for this purpose (VRM, 2: 438n).

[113] The German concept Kant uses for "training" is *abrichten*, which originally signifies the training of animals. When he applies this concept to human beings, it means "the taming of our natural animal independence," without which one would be "wild" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1170). Training is "merely negative," then, "by means of which man's tendency to savagery is taken away" (Päd, 9: 442; see KU, 5: 432). For a comprehensive study of Kant's theory of animality and its relation to his theory of race, see Baumeister 2022 (especially 108–12, on "black animality").

[114] Among Kant's contemporaries with whose work he was acquainted, Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) was the one who most explicitly and unreservedly connected the racialized characteristics of "Negroes" with their suitability for slavery, seeing the latter as overall advantageous to humanity as a whole. In 1788, the same year that Kant published his third essay on race, Meiners published an article in his popular Göttingen historical magazine, "Ueber die Rechtmäßigkeit des Neger-Handels" (about the legitimacy of the slave trade). In it, Meiners registered the cruelty of the slave trade but defended it, primarily in materialistic terms, as on the whole beneficial to the human race (1788). Meiners had already laid the theoretical ground for this kind of argument in his earlier monograph on the history of humanity (1785). Then, in 1790, he published a series of lengthy articles in the same Göttingen historical magazine to defend the trading and enslavement of West Africans (1790a, 1790b, 1790c), who both Buffon and Kant had singled out as true "Negroes" and portrayed as natural slaves. I thank Jennifer Mensch for urging me to consider those texts by Meiners. For a brief discussion of Meiners's view on slavery, see Sutherland 2016: 35–41.

[115] Kant never made a clear case for the abolition of the slave trade (let alone the abolition of slavery). It was not for lack of appropriate occasions. In the "Conflict of Faculties" (1798), for instance, he mentioned the British debate about the slave trade, but passed no value judgment about it (SF, 7: 90).

more worried about racial slavery's eventual negative consequences for the European states than he is interested in defending the dignity or freedom of the enslaved.[116] In "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795), for instance, he says the following about the effects of racial slavery *on the Europeans*:

> The worst of this (or, considered from the standpoint of a moral judge, the best) is that the commercial states *do not even profit from this violence*; that all these trading companies are on the verge of collapse; that the Sugar Islands, that place of the cruelest and most calculated slavery,[117] *yield no true profit* but serve only a mediate and indeed not very laudable purpose, namely, training sailors for warships and so, in turn, carrying on *wars in Europe*. (ZeF, 8: 359, emphasis added)

Similarly, Kant rejects the "Negro trade [*Negerhandel*]" because, being "in itself a violation of the hospitality of black people, [it] becomes even more so *for Europe because of its consequences*"—including never-ending struggles among some European states with their increased sea power (VEF, 23: 174, emphasis added). The violations that the European states committed overseas now clearly threaten to ricochet onto themselves, with the specter of a perpetual war among them—or, worse still, of a possible domination of one nation over all the others—as opposed to a perpetually peaceful equilibrium of mutually limiting sovereign states.[118] Kant was writing around the mid-1790s after all. What would come to be known as the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) in Saint-Domingue had turned into a three-way power struggle among Britain, Spain, and France, with Britain temporarily asserting domination and France abolishing slavery on the island at this juncture (Napoleon

[116] As I have explained in Lu-Adler 2022c, the passages that Kleingeld cited to support her claim about Kant's supposedly categorical condemnation of chattel slavery either do not concern *racial* slavery or at best suggest that he saw it as a cautionary tale for labor practices *in Europe*.

[117] The matter-of-fact reference to "the Negroes on the Sugar Islands" suggests that Kant knew about their situation. The cruel practices of slavery on the West Indian sugar plantations had been well documented by this time. The formerly enslaved African British author Olaudah Equiano (c.1745–97) reported in his popular autobiography *The Interesting Narrative*, for instance, that even on the island of Barbados, "where slaves meet with the best treatment," "the whole term of a negro's life may be said to be there but sixteen years" (Equiano 2003: 106; see Burke and Burke 1760: 124–25, which Equiano cited as his source). Equiano's book, it is worth adding, went through nine English editions during his life, between 1789 and 1794 (I am referring to the 2013 reproduction of the 1794 edition). Its first German translation appeared in 1792 (see Equiano 1792), before the very late Kant still had time to reconsider his take on slavery.

[118] See Valdez 2017 for a similar analysis of Kant's critical remarks about colonialism in "Toward Perpetual Peace": his leading concern at the time was the potentially devastating impact of European expansionism and intra-European rivalries on the prospect of a lasting peace in Europe.

would reinstate slavery in 1802).[119] Whatever Kant's "moral judge" saw, he did not see an opportune moment to endorse the abolitionist cause, of which he was evidently aware, as the *morally* right thing to do.

As far as I can tell, if Kant came to express some qualms about racial slavery, it was not thanks to any moral epiphany. It was rather that, by the mid-1790s, he could no longer see racial slavery simply as something that facilitated progress—for example, by dramatically increasing material productions and promoting an intricate global trading network[120]—without such advancements being outweighed by more destructive costs. If Kant refrained from criticizing racial slavery in the 1780s because he believed in its overriding material benefits to historical progress, it (or how it had been practiced) now seemed objectionable for the same logic: it might actually jeopardize any prospect of a perpetually peaceful cosmopolitan union of sovereign states.

To elaborate, as Kant put it back in 1784, antagonistic struggles between the states are tolerable only if "such ills . . . necessitate our species to devise to the in itself salutary resistance of many states to one another arising from their freedom a law of equilibrium" (IaG, 8: 26). He would again emphasize the constraint imposed by this basic principle of equilibrium in "Toward Perpetual Peace" a decade later (ZeF, 8: 367–68). To strike a hopeful note, he would also stress that each nation's commercial self-interest will compel it to promote peace and prevent war by mediation: such is how "nature guarantees perpetual peace through the mechanism of human inclinations itself" (ZeF, 8: 368; see TP, 8: 312–13).[121] At the same time, however, the political reality in the 1790s was such that Britain, with its unparalleled naval power, dominated both the slave trade and the plantation economy. Power can be intoxicating: the empire had an insatiable thirst for more, as suggested by Britain's involvement in Saint-Domingue, which had been the most lucrative French colony in the West Indies—mainly for its sugar and coffee—as well as a linchpin in the Atlantic slave economy. Britain would see little reason to

[119] For a classical account of the Haitian Revolution, see James 1989 (especially 132–37 and 199–223, on Britain's fateful and short-lived involvement). On the commercial significance of Saint-Domingue in the eighteenth century, which explained Britain's desire to control the island, see Trouillot 1982. For a more thorough analysis of the historical backdrop and development of the Haitian Revolution, see Geggus 2002. For an account that focuses on the question of civic rights (or lack thereof), see Koekkoek 2019: 57–77 (57n1 contains an overview of secondary literature).

[120] On the relation between slavery and the slave trade, on the one hand, and the making of the capitalist global economy, on the other, see De Zwart and Van Zanden 2018: 92–120; Inikori 2020.

[121] On the role that Kant's (Eurocentric) view of commerce plays in his political theory, see Ypi 2014; Huseyinzadegan 2019: 117–57.

curtail its expansionist ambitions. Why would it negotiate with other powers if it had the wherewithal to weaken them further and simply control the entire production and trading network? A similar point can be made about France in the 1790s and beyond: it would battle with Britain for European and global hegemony through the protracted French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802) and Napoleonic Wars (1803–15).[122] In sum, the geopolitical reality in the 1790s (through the ensuing decade or so) was that the world had become the stage on which two ambitious empires, France and Britain, fought each other for a super-imperialist domination. Slavery and the slave trade, which in turn affected whose navy could control the global trade routes and leverage that control in international relations, were an integral part of that battle.[123]

Given this historical backdrop, here is a most plausible interpretation of Kant's fundamentally consistent approach to racial slavery: in private, he might have always regarded it as *morally* wrong in itself;[124] but whether he would call for its abolishment—or, more conservatively, radical reform—hinges on how he, as a disinterested philosopher reflecting on the possibility and mechanisms of human progress, would evaluate it in light of the *political realities* at a given point in history. This approach is analogous to how Kant

[122] See Esdaile 2018; Mikaberidze 2020. It is also worth noting that 1794 saw the beginning of the so-called *Franzosenzeit* (until 1815), during which period much of Northern Europe would be controlled by France (Rowe 1999; Stubbe da Luz 2003; Van der Burg 2021: 23–44).

[123] This is partly because the economic fortune of each empire, which in turn determined its military might, was tied to its involvement in slavery and the slave trade. On the British situation, see Richardson 1998; Morgan 2000. On the French case, see Geggus 2001; Marzagalli 2011.

[124] To my knowledge, Kant never explicitly made such a concession, at least not in unambiguous terms. The furthest he went was the following caveated statement from a physical geography lecture in 1792: "Negro trade is certainly morally **re**prehensible, but it would have taken place even without the Europeans" (V-PG/Dohna, 26.2: 1142). It is unclear what Kant meant to get across with this claim. One option is to flesh it out in Hegelian terms. In his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) offers the following picture: Atlantic slavery was the only link that "Negroes," for all their wildness and intransigence (*Unbändlichkeit*), still had with the Europeans; "Negroes" themselves saw nothing wrong with slavery; on the contrary, the tribal kings embraced it as a way to get rid of their captive enemies or even their own underlings. While slavery is wrong in and of itself (*an und für sich unrecht*) because man's essence is freedom, Hegel submits, man must first become ready for this freedom. This readying requires a liberation from the state of nature (*Naturzustand*). According to Hegel, such is the state of *absolute* injustice in which "Negroes" had existed before they came into contact with the Europeans. By this logic, the Atlantic slavery serves a liberatory function—notwithstanding its *relative* injustice—and so can be seen as a moment of progress and a moment of education for "Negroes" (1970: 128–29). For contextualized analyses of Hegel's view on slavery, see Smith 1992; Bernasconi 1998; Buck-Morss 2009; Stone 2017: 254–56. What these analyses reveal is that, although the theoretical foundations for Kant's and Hegel's views on racial slavery are different, in each case this institution derives its meaning within the philosopher's *system*, especially in connection with his philosophy of history. I thank the following participants at the Race & Imperialism Reading Group meetings (supported by the Goethe Society of North America) in February 2022 for edifying discussions of Hegel's view on race and slavery: Michael Saman (organizer), Ashley Clark, Daniel Purdy, Ellwood Wiggins, Jason Yonover, and John Zammito.

views women, whose primary function is "the preservation of the species." In this case, he chooses as his principle something that "does not depend on our choice but on a higher purpose for the human race." So the question is "not what we *make* our end, but what *nature's end* was." Such an end, "by means of the foolishness of human beings, must still be wisdom according to nature's purpose" (Anth, 7: 305–6). In similar terms Kant could, coherently, regard racial slavery both as morally wrong (a *human being* ought not to use another as the means to *his* end) and as an arrangement conducive to *nature's* end—until it no longer seemed to serve this end.[125]

In this way, Kant's failure to condemn racial slavery in unambiguously moral terms has fundamentally to do with his teleological view of human history. He sees the moral state of humanity—the state of moralization—as a remote destiny to be approximated over an indefinitely long period of time and under unpredictable historical conditions. When considering humanity from a historical standpoint, he locates its current state somewhere between savagery and moralization: if, in spite of "the malevolence of human nature, which can be seen unconcealed in the free relations of nations," there is "a still greater . . . moral predisposition to eventually become master of the evil principle within him," the latter predisposition is "at present dormant" (ZeF, 8: 355).[126] Just as all naturally endowed germs and predispositions require *external conditions* to develop, so does the presumptive moral predisposition. From Kant's perspective, one such condition is a perpetually peaceful cosmopolitan union of free states. But it is also the hardest one to obtain: humanity will have to endure "the chaotic condition of the present relations between states," in which condition they will remain long until they finally labor their way out of it (IaG, 8: 26). In these terms, the connection between morality and racial slavery is for Kant *indirect* and historically contingent: slavery turns out to be bad not so much because it has violated the dignity of some actual human beings as because it has become a major obstacle to peaceful relations among (already civilized) states, wherefore it impedes humanity's progress toward its moral destiny.

This analysis of Kant's approach to racial slavery in light of his teleological view of human history also helps to show how his monogenism is no

[125] For a similar account of the parallel between Kant's treatment of women and his treatment of nonwhites, see Marwah 2019: 109. Also see Marwah 2013 (a focused study of the former) and 2022 (a study of the latter), which accentuate the role of teleology in the Kantian sexism and racism, respectively.

[126] Also see V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1197–98; Anth, 7: 324–25; IaG, 8: 26; Päd, 9: 451.

compassionate alternative to polygenism. Like Buffon, Kant the philosopher is laser focused on the progress of humanity *as a species*, which consists in an indefinitely extended series of biological generations, not a sum of all coexisting individuals. This preoccupation with the species-bound progress shapes how each philosopher, to borrow an expression from Inder Marwah (2019: 109), *instrumentalizes* racial differences within his own historical framework.

In Buffon's case, as I explained in section 4.4.4, the need to account for every variety—including every race (qua specific variety)—within a single, linearly progressing history led him to speculate about what to do with the, in his view, severely "degenerated" race of "Negroes," for instance. And the way he theorized about the cause of human differences determined his response. It resembles the eugenic, allegedly philanthropic proposal by Maupertuis that I mentioned earlier in this section: to incorporate the "Negro" race into the forward trajectory of human progress—toward the perfection or ideal represented by the original human prototype—is to improve its progeny by removing it from the conditions of its degeneration.

Kant, as we saw, has rejected this kind of approach as unnatural, as contrary to the grand scheme of nature. To the extent that, in his view, *racial* characteristics are by definition irreversible and "Negroes" are *by nature* suited for the culture of slaves but nothing else, he has but one way of folding them into his single history of humanity: nature may use their enslavement as a means of progress during a transitional phase of history when humanity is still far, far from its destined moralization; and this instrumentalization of an entire race—only by nature, mind you—is tolerable for as long as it is compatible with the prospect of a lasting peace among the European nations that have direct or indirect stakes in the institution of racial slavery.

This is not to say that Kant regards racial slavery as *morally* permissible. Rather, he does not see it as a moral issue to be addressed on its own, but consistently measures it by its role in the teleologically oriented *history* of humanity. This single-minded and highly abstract orientation is at odds with any compassion toward individuals *in concreto*. The latter, as far as Kant is concerned, can only distract: the disinterested philosopher of history, as he suggested in the "Idea," must look away from all apparent evils committed against individuals, in order to concentrate—without any distraction—on what it would take for humanity *as a species* to progress steadily toward its final (moral) destiny. It only makes sense, then, that Kant's remarks about

racial slavery show no clear indication of concerns about the well-being, dignity, or freedom of the enslaved and traded "Negroes" qua individuals.

## 4.6. Conclusion

This chapter shows how Kant's raciology fits into the process of racial knowledge production in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. This process engendered a fundamental shift whereby the Europeans started seeing themselves and others primarily in terms of *racial* (as opposed to, say, religious) differences. I treated the process that led to this shift as a multilateral, collaborative, and temporally extended one that involved countless players, without thereby downplaying the unique contribution that Kant made as an exceedingly sophisticated thinker. I focused on the co-contributions by other prominent natural philosophers. Using Kant's distinction between objectively historical and rational cognitions (section 4.1), I began by examining the role that Bacon and some fellows of the early Royal Society of London, especially Boyle, played in promoting and guiding a *global data collection* during the seventeenth century. Their involvement helped to ensure that the data collected about humans in other parts of the world be comparable with one another and hence appear reliable and useful to natural philosophers (section 4.2). In the process, skin color became a salient subject of inquiry (section 4.2.2).

Based on such data, Linnaeus divided all humans into four principal varieties in accordance with their skin colors (1735). This division, though simplistic and artificial, would be groundbreaking because Linnaeus *embedded* it in a *systematic taxonomy* of all products of nature, whereby human differences became an object of scientific investigation *on a par with other natural phenomena*. To natural philosophers who believed in the unity of human species (monogenesis), this arrangement suggested the possibility of explaining human differences as a result of efficient causality in accordance with certain general laws of nature (section 4.3).

Buffon developed a basic theoretical framework for such an explanation. Kant's theory of race built on but also significantly departed from Buffon's account of human varieties. I highlighted three points of departure. First, whereas Buffon's account was at bottom a description of nature (*Naturbeschreibung*) based on comparisons of empirical data, Kant sought to establish a proper natural history (*Naturgeschichte*) of humanity

in accordance with concepts and principles that can be ascertained a priori. Second, while the biomarkers of Buffon's varieties are malleable depending on external conditions, Kant takes racial characteristics to be irreversible and persistently hereditary under all circumstances. Third, Kant came to reject degeneration, which was central to Buffon's scientific monogenism, as an inadmissible way of explaining hereditary differences (sections 4.4 and 4.5).

Their disagreements aside, Linnaeus, Buffon, and Kant together (besides many others) helped to produce a substantive body of *racial knowledge*. It includes two main parts. One consists in a reductive division of all known human inhabitants on earth into a few principal races or varieties. Whatever conceptual distinction there is between the Kantian "race" and the Linnaean-Buffonian "variety," it would matter little to ordinary folks who are not philosophers. Much as Blumenbach would later treat Kant's racial division—mistakenly, Kant would protest—as one of many artificial divisions, including Linnaeus's among others,[127] so might ordinary folks treat all such divisions equally as sharp delineations of racial categories. The ubiquity plus ambiguity of the term 'race' might be one reason why it would continue to serve many social and political functions. I will take up this point in Chapter 5.

The other part of the racial knowledge produced in the eighteenth century is what gives it the distinctive appearance of a racial *science*. Buffon and Kant each in his own way worked out a deliberately methodic and purportedly scientific explanation of how the same human species can develop into so many varieties or races. Inspired by the cutting-edge and norm-setting Newtonianism, they subjected the phenomenon of human differences to the general laws of nature that can explain variations within any animal species. Importantly, this scientific investigation of human differences took place in a world that was increasingly defined by *practices* of racial hegemony. The most egregious forms of such practices include enslaving black Africans, who Buffon and Kant singled out as true "Negroes," and driving Amerindians, who were mere "savages" to both Buffon and Kant, from their ancestral land (or simply annihilating them by force and by infecting them with Western diseases). It was against this historical backdrop that Buffon and Kant opined

[127] Blumenbach 1781: 49–50; 1865: 266–68. Blumenbach thereby completely ignores Kant's concerted effort to separate the artificial (Linnaean) and natural (Kantian) systems of classification. To Blumenbach, as it was to Buffon, variations within the same human species are a matter of *insensibly transitioning degrees*, so that no definitive boundaries can be marked out anywhere. All divisions of human varieties are therefore necessarily arbitrary, although some of them are better than others in terms of methodology and empirical-evidential support (1781: 47–105; 1865: 97–129, 190–276).

about these two so-called races in terms of their utility, as if sizing them up with the gaze of a potential slave master (sections 4.4.2 and 4.5.2). Just as important, they divulged their opinions at a time when the European folk imagination was likely already corrupted by prejudicial literature about the "other." The body of scientific works on human differences produced by Buffon, Kant, and others together invested those folk prejudices with "a new intellectual authority" and "converted the scattered misconceptions and antagonisms of traders and travelers into coherent systems." In this way, the rise of racial science transformed "racism" from what was "little more than a visceral distrust of physical difference" to "an 'objective' and self-conscious conviction in the radical inferiority of certain visibly different groups" (Hudson 1996: 252).

I want to foreground two lessons with this account of racial knowledge production and Kant's place in it. To capture these lessons, let me borrow the following poem from Octavia Butler's prescient dystopian novel *Parable of the Sower*.

> All struggles
> Are essentially
> power struggles.
> Who will rule,
> Who will lead,
> Who will define,
> refine,
> confine,
> design,
> Who will dominate. (1993: 89)

To this I add the following statement from Eric Voegelin's "The Growth of the Race Idea," written during the World War II.

> The effectiveness of a conquering race, however, is not a function of its innate qualities, but of the point of time at which it has—for inscrutable reasons—embarked on its historic development. (1940: 300)

In these terms (along with the title of Butler's novel), one can say that the racial classifications and theories developed by Kant and others are like the seeds sown. Once sown, they will grow—and occasionally mutate—in ways

that are beyond the sowers' control. Meanwhile, the existing *power structure*, as historically contingent as it may be, determines who gets to construct racial concepts and who gets to use them as tools to rule over the racial other. Try as a Buffon or a Kant might to be objective and to base his division of human varieties or races only on strictly factual reports, he still could not afford not to reflect on the fact that he was dividing up humanity at a time when their own supposed race was engaged in what they knew were often brutal exploitations of other so-called races.

Nor should such a person fancy that his trusted travelers could escape the Eurocentric and objectifying *viewpoint* from which they saw the strangers they encountered overseas. Most of their observations about the non-European other were bound to be unreliable, no matter how hard natural philosophers like Bacon and Boyle tried to regulate them. Herder once lamented the lack of authentic information about Africa:

> how deficient are we in authentic information respecting this country! . . . How fortunate would it have been for the knowledge of nature, and of man, had a company of travellers, endued with the penetration of Forster, the patience of Spar[r]mann,[128] and the science of both, visited this undiscovered country! (1966: 148–49)

But Herder's favorite scientific travelers would still have their limitations. Even Herder himself, if he were to "enter the [African] country appropriate to [the negro] with modesty" (1966: 146), as he implores others to do, would not be able to avoid seeing its peoples in a distorted way. Placing a high premium on happiness, for instance, Herder wishfully expects to find many "happy and peaceful nations," as opposed to "artificial" ones, in the still understudied land of Africa (1966: 149). His romanticizing tropes about its peoples include a *natural* lack of "finer intellect" among other "nobler gifts," a lack that he thinks is amply compensated by their carefree way of life and the sensual pleasures that they are *physiologically* constituted to enjoy (1966: 151–52).[129]

[128] Herder is likely referring to Anders Sparrman (1748–1820), a Swedish naturalist and Linnaeus's student. He was best known for his voyage to the Cape of Good Hope from 1772 through 1776 (for a later version of the resulting report, see Sparrman 1801).

[129] One can find similar examples throughout Herder's volume. Speaking of the "Hindustan," for instance, he laments the fate of these "Happy lambs": how happy this people might have been, "if the hands of men had not combined to desolate the garden of nature, and to depress the most innocent of human beings by tyranny and superstition!" And "why could not Nature feed you careless and undisturbed on your native plains?" (1966: 141–42). On the relation between civilization, or lack thereof, and a people's way of life, see Herder 1966: 202–8. On happiness, which in his view comes more from

In Herder's case, the romanticizing tropes about the (sub-Saharan) African nevertheless came with a sweeping indictment of the European and an unmistakable antislavery stance, which was markedly absent in Buffon's and Kant's works (sections 4.4.2 and 4.5.2). "Negroes should be made to inhabit Africa," Herder contends, not transported elsewhere by slave traders; the Europeans, who "have unpardonably sinned, and still continue to sin, against this quarter of the Globe," are therefore "unworthy to behold their happiness" (1966: 149, 152). Alas, the damage was in fact done, and sin committed. The switch to a racialized worldview had been decidedly made by the end of the eighteenth century. The seeds of all forms of consciously or unconsciously *racial* hegemony and *racial* struggle had been sown and started to germinate, take roots, and grow with the helping hands of historical circumstances *and* philosophers. We will look at some examples in Chapters 5 and 6.

the *heart's* feelings than from a brilliant understanding, see Herder 1966: 218–24. For analyses (especially regarding Herder's views on cultural differences and history), see Sikka 2011: 12–159; Zhang 2017: 119–60.

# PART III

# A WORLDVIEW TRANSFORMED BY "RACE"

# 5

# What Is Seen Cannot Be Unseen

## What Kant Can(not) Tell Us about Racial (Self-)Perceptions

### 5.1. Introduction

In Chapters 3 and 4, I focused on how Kant developed a theory of race from the standpoint of a philosophical investigator of nature (*Naturforscher*). He did so against the backdrop of two related intellectual events in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the global data collection that natural philosophers like Bacon and Boyle thought was necessary for compiling an extensive natural history to ground natural philosophy, and the efforts within the rising life sciences to study human beings as natural products belonging in the animal realm and to interpret their manifest variations accordingly. The concept of race that Kant developed against this backdrop was at first a thin biological concept applicable to animals in general. In his 1785 essay, "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race," 'race' is so defined that it refers merely to "the classificatory difference of the animals of one and the same phylum in so far as this difference is unfailingly hereditary" (BBM, 8: 100). In the case of humans, Kant treats skin color as the *only* classificatory difference that satisfies this definition (8: 93–95).[1]

Meanwhile, as I suggested in Chapter 4, a thicker notion of race was operative in Kant's remarks about the various racialized populations in some of his writings and lectures on anthropology and physical geography as well as in his 1775/77 and 1788 essays on race. According to this notion, the hereditary characteristics of a race include not only skin color but also

[1] By teasing out this thin concept of race, I do not wish to suggest that it is morally innocent. I thank Reza Mosayebi for suggesting that, morally speaking, Kant's scientific concept of race or what I am calling his thin concept may be *inherently* normative from the get-go and that even a merely heuristic distinction between thin and thick concepts of race in Kant can be hazardous. I already explained in Chapters 3 and 4 the practical stakes of speculating—as a theoretical excise—about human differences when the speculation took place in the context of de facto domination of one population by another. I leave it to interested readers to look further into the matter.

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certain temperaments and (lack of) talents. One can certainly say that racial prejudices, such as the association of black skin with low intelligence, had already been present in the European folk and intellectual imaginations before Kant expressed them. After all, when he first published disparaging claims about the "Negroes of Africa" in 1764, he was echoing Hume's infamous claim about nonwhites in "Of National Characters" (GSE, 2: 253). Nevertheless, Kant's well-developed *theory* of race offered a potent framework for binding what were otherwise scattered prejudices together to form a unified idea.

It is not that the temperaments and (lack of) talents attributed to a race are seen as entailed by skin color. Kant is too logical a thinker to make such an obviously invalid inference or to take it seriously. Rather, as I suggested in Chapters 3 and 4, what helps to unify those elements is the teleological-mechanical mode of explanation (*Erklärungsart*) that he developed and refined over time. With this *Erklärungsart*, one can explain any trait that purportedly remains constant across climates—for example, laziness or disinclination for work—as the heritable product of certain inner predispositions and external environments. Thus, if the thick notion of race at first consisted only in habituated, merely subjective associations of skin colors with various other traits, the Kantian concept of race helped to unify those elements and imbue their connection with a sense of objective reality. Scientific racism followed on its heels: now one could employ scientific-sounding justifications for racially exclusionary doctrines and practices. I explained how Kant manifested this kind of racism with respect to "Negroes" and Amerindians in Chapter 4. I will give one more example in Chapter 6, where the exclusion affects every population other than the Occidental whites.

In the present chapter, I will take a step back and revisit my account of Kant's relation to racism in Chapter 2, where I emphasized his role in the formation of a modern racial ideology that is also racist.[2] This is partly because I need to answer a predictable reaction to my account in Chapters 3 and 4. The reaction may go like this: we can falsify Kant's racial theory—insofar as it purports to belong in natural science—on empirical, methodological, and theoretical-philosophical grounds; and we can easily debunk Kant's claims

[2] In this chapter, I distinguish "racist" and nonracist "racial" ideologies: a racial ideology is racist only if it serves to exclude people from certain goods on account of their designated race (I explained this exclusionary notion of racism in Chapter 2). I draw this conceptual distinction to leave room for the historically oppressed, discriminated, or marginalized "races" to use a reconstituted racialism—or what Paul Taylor (2022) calls "critical racialism"—for *antiracist* purposes.

about nonwhites, considering that we are better informed than he was; once we have thereby rendered both of his thin and thick notions of race empty, we can leave this part of Kant behind and focus our intellectual energy on the remainder of his system.

Such a reaction, as well intended as it may be, is overly simplistic. For one, as I shall explain in the forward-looking conclusion to this book, a *colorblind* Kantianism is unequipped to confront the *racial* injustices that still beset our societies today. If one wants to appropriate Kant's philosophy for anti-racist purposes, one cannot simply excise raciology from it or assume that, by making the Kantian theorizing sufficiently abstract and colorless, it will be better suited to articulate demands against racism. For another, as I suggested in Chapter 2 and will explain further in section 5.2 of this chapter, once race concepts have been invented and taken up by meaning makers in a society, they can be used in such a way that is irresponsive to empirical counterevidence and theoretical interventions. Among other things, they may be used as symbolic anchors for how one orients oneself and relates to others in a world where powers and resources are unequally distributed along racial lines. Studying this kind of use will be my focus in the present chapter.

I shall carry out the study by analyzing the racial dynamics portrayed in two German novellas published within a decade or so after Kant's death (1804), *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811) by Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811) and *William der Neger* (1817) by Caroline Auguste Fischer (1764–1842).[3] I have two basic reasons for using these two works.

First, I chose the genre of fiction partly because fiction writers can capture certain subjective experiences of their time in a way that a philosopher like Kant could not or would not. Granted, as we shall see, Fischer and Kleist were still looking at race from a white European's perspective no matter how much empathy they might wish to convey for their black or mixed-race subjects. What matters in this chapter, however, is that they were *attentive* to and sought to shed light on the problematics of race and that their novellas at least gave us a sense of what a racialized world looked like from the standpoint of two of Kant's fellow Germans in the early nineteenth century, not long after his passing. Kant, by contrast, would choose to *look away* from the

[3] I thank the following participants at the Race & Imperialism Reading Group meetings (supported by the Goethe Society of North America) in June and July 2021 for helping me to appreciate the two novellas: Michael Saman (organizer), Paulina Choh, Sally Gray, Jennifer Mensch, Michael Olson, Howard Pollack-Milgate, Daniel Purdy, and Patty Simpson.

subjective legacies of the racial thinking that he helped to shape by inventing and sharpening the relevant framing devices, including a recognizably modern concept of race.[4] We can trace such a choice not so much to a cold heart on Kant's part—for we can never ascertain what is in an individual's heart—as to his exaltation of *abstraction* both as a philosophical method and as a pragmatic virtue (I will explain this point in section 5.3).

Second, both novellas are set against the backdrop of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue (the Haitian Revolution), with an explicit focus on the race problem.[5] The revolt took place during the last decade or so of Kant's life, from August 1791 through January 1804 (Kant died the following month). It lasted long enough for him to register its existence. And he must be aware of the brutal practices of racial slavery behind the revolt. After all, as I noted in Chapter 4, Saint-Domingue was among the most profitable of those "Sugar Islands" that he mentioned in "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795) as "that place of the cruelest and most calculated slavery" (ZeF, 8: 359). Yet Kant was entirely silent about the Haitian Revolution (I already pointed out in Chapter 4 that he showed no support for the abolition of either racial slavery or what he called the "Negro trade," although he knew about the then-ongoing English abolitionist movement). It apparently never dawned on him to think twice about his own raciology in light of the racial struggles that evidently affected not only blacks but also some whites (as we will see in both Kleist's and Fischer's novellas). As I pointed out in Chapter 1, when his 1788 essay on race was last reprinted in 1799, the reprint kept intact all the original statements about "Negroes" that portrayed them as natural slaves. Nor did it occur to Kant to revise his earlier view that only white peoples can participate in revolutions (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1188). This is not a minor oversight. By granting nonwhites the capacity (if not legitimate rights) to bring about revolutions, Kant would have seen them anew as citizens of a civil state and *political agents* in the course of history.[6] That he did not do so should give anyone pause who is presented with a colorblind rendering of Kantian (political) agency. I will use Fischer's novella and, to some extent, Kleist's as well

[4] I thank Laura Papish for suggesting that I use "subjective legacy" to talk about the aftermath of Kant's raciology.

[5] For an anthology that contains a wide range of literary depictions of the Haitian Revolution published from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, see Daut et al. 2022. For a thorough study of how race—especially the problematic status of mixed-race people—figures in the literary history of the Haitian Revolution between 1789 (before the revolution officially started) and 1865, see Daut 2015.

[6] Kant's (evolving) position on revolution is a controversial topic. For different interpretations, see Beck 1978; Korsgaard 2008: 233–62; Cummiskey 2008.

to present a contrasting picture, where subjects who are (self-)identified as black will assert agency on their own terms, honorably or otherwise.

Now let me briefly introduce the two novellas and highlight the particular relevance of each. *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* revolves around a tragic love story that took place in 1803, near the end of the Haitian Revolution. I use this story, together with Kleist's self-described "Kant crisis," to illustrate how no one in a racially hegemonic world—be they black, white, or somewhat mixed—can avoid seeing or being seen through a racial lens. Racial perceptions can be contextual.[7] In the Saint-Domingue of 1803, the European's racial ideology with its presumption of white supremacy would be turned upside down in the hands of the revolting "Negroes": whiteness now symbolizes moral deprivation and evil, wherefore all who are seen as white deserved punishment (death); meanwhile, all who self-identify or are perceived by others as black represented the formerly oppressed and are obliged to participate in a just retribution against the whites. The character Toni in Kleist's novella, a mestiza, is tragically caught between the two diametrically opposed racial ideologies. No nuance is permitted in her black and white world: she must choose one or the other racial identity. Her eventual *self-identification as white* fatefully collides with the reality that she is *perceived as black* both by her black relatives and by her white betrothed (section 5.4).

The question of racial identity is also front and center in *William der Neger*, which has a far more hopeful ending. My analysis will highlight how the title character William, a kidnapped African living in England, evolves in his racial self-consciousness: at first, he feels ashamed when he sees his blackness through the eyes of the white other; next, he struggles with the tension between that feeling and a sense of dignity on account of his humanity; finally, when he realizes that these feelings cannot be reconciled in a racially unequal world, he decides to embrace his black identity and the historical duty that comes with it. By connecting this narrative with W. E. B. Du Bois's theory of double consciousness, we will see a fundamentally different way of reconstituting racial ideology than simply flipping the European version thereof (as the blacks did in Kleist's novella).

The latter approach can perpetuate a vicious cycle of racialized oppressions, with different races playing the role of oppressor at different times or in different contexts. Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, a formerly

[7] On the contextual nature of racialization, see Gold 2004.

enslaved African-British writer, presciently warned about such a possibility in his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (first published in 1787). There would be no guarantee of peace for the formerly oppressed, he cautions, if they as punishers "went beyond the bounds of a just retaliation, and fell into the same crimes of the oppressor" (1999: 60). Cugoano wrote this warning while reflecting on two apparently conflicting laws of Christianity that pertain to the moral decision about racial slavery and the slave trade. One is the law of retribution, which "requires an equal retaliation and restoration for every injury that men may do to others"; the other is "the law of forbearance, righteousness and forgiveness." Cugoano argues that the slave-traders and enslavers "should be suppressed, and deprived of their liberty, or perhaps their lives," in that "the taking away the natural liberties of men, and compelling them to any involuntary slavery or compulsory service, is an injury and robbery contrary to all law, civilization, reason, justice, equity, and humanity" (1999: 51–52). He also suggests that the Europeans not directly involved in the institutions of slavery were no more innocent, insofar as they failed to stand up against those institutions (1999: 79–80, 87–89). At the same time, however, Cugoano does not lose sight of the need to approach just retribution with *love*, if humanity is truly to heal its wounds and to enjoy lasting peace (1999: 50).

It is with this love for humanity that the William in Fischer's novella ends up embracing his identity as a "Negro" and throwing himself into the fight to liberate all blacks. In this way, his pursuit of the freedom of his people is a race-conscious one. While he must leave his white friends in order to lead this cause *as a black man*, he apparently also hopes to reunite with those friends as a black man. If so, the hoped-for future is a union of different races that does not obliterate their differences. Thus, the idea of race continues to play a salient role in how William understands himself and navigates his social relations (section 5.5). I will resume this point in the concluding section 5.6, to suggest that the still ongoing struggle for a cosmopolitan future cannot be colorblind.

To pave the way for these analyses, I will also take a critical look at Kant's account of abstraction. I will make two points that pertain to the issue of race (section 5.3). One has to do with how Kant the philosopher employs abstraction to arrive at his theoretical concept of race. My exposition of this point will again explain why I am turning to novelists like Kleist and Fischer in this chapter: whereas the Kantian philosopher theorizes *in abstracto* and exhibits little concern about how the resulting theory may affect the lived individual

experiences *in concreto*, the novelists are sensitive to such experiences, albeit in a fictionalized form. Meanwhile, and this takes me to my second point, when Kant does talk about the practice of abstraction in society or, rather, about how some people fail at it and thereby become unhappy, he has lent us some vocabulary to appreciate just how difficult it can be for people to abstract from or ignore race in a world that has been transformed by race concepts (I will say more about this transformation in section 5.2). This difficulty is most pronounced for a race that has been systematically denigrated, as I shall argue by drawing on Kant's remarks about women who become overly self-conscious in social settings (section 5.3). This will give us another reason to think that we cannot address racial problems in a colorblind way, which would amount to asking the historically marginalized races to do what cannot be fairly demanded of them, namely to stop looking at the world or themselves through the racial lens (section 5.6).

## 5.2. From Race Concepts to Racial Ideology

Before we proceed, let me return to the reaction to my analysis of Kant's raciology that I anticipated in section 5.1. Here is another way to describe the reaction. One may protest that I have been dwelling too much on the outdated stuff in Kant's philosophical corpus. One may say: Kant was empirically unfounded with respect to both the thin and thick concepts of race mentioned above; such concepts, insofar as they purport to pick out aspects of reality, are flat out *empty*; we should call this out and move on, period. To this end, one may point to the Statement on Race or "Declaration by World's Scientists" that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued in 1950 (primarily as a response to the Nazi racialization of Jews among other supposedly inferior peoples). According to the Statement,

> [1] the term 'race' designates a group or population characterised by some concentrations, relative as to frequency and distribution, of hereditary particles (genes) or physical characters, which appear, fluctuate, and often disappear in the course of time by reason of geographic and/or cultural isolation. [2] The varying manifestations of these traits in different populations are perceived in different ways by each group. What is perceived is largely preconceived, so that each group arbitrarily tends to misinterpret the

> variability which occurs as a fundamental difference which separates that group from all others. (UNESCO 1950: 8)[8]

These claims contradict Kant's thin concept of race on two fronts. First, [1] suggests that no genetic trait is unfailingly hereditary or absolutely unchangeable across all geographical regions over time. Second, according to [2], which of the more or less hereditary traits one singles out—for example, skin color—to differentiate various populations is fundamentally arbitrary, depending more on one's subjective preconception than on objectively existing natural boundaries.

The UNESCO Statement also debunks the kind of thick notion of race that I attributed to Kant as a mere "myth of 'race.'"[9]

> The scientific material available to us at present does not justify the conclusion that inherited genetic differences are a major factor in producing the differences between the cultures and cultural achievements of different peoples or groups. . . . The one trait which above all others has been at a premium in the evolution of men's mental characters has been educability, plasticity.[10] This is a trait which all human beings possess. It is, indeed, a species character of "Homo sapiens." (1950: 8)

So, whereas Kant attributed nonwhite races' alleged lack of (advanced) culture to certain fixed and hereditary inabilities, the UNESCO Statement traces differences in cultural achievements to external influences. It makes the same point about temperament: "there is no definite evidence that there exist inborn differences between human groups" in this respect; at any rate, whatever such differences there may be, they are "greatly over-ridden by the individual differences, and by the differences springing from environmental factors" (1950: 8).

Thus, one may say that the 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race has rendered vacuous Kant's thin and thick concepts of race alike.[11] This cannot be the

[8] The first UNESCO Statement on Race appeared in two pages of the July-August issue of its *Courier* magazine in 1950. Page 1 contains a summary of the scientists' major conclusions about race, titled "Fallacies of Race Exposed." Page 8 contains a more detailed explication thereof, titled "The Scientific Basis for Human Unity." I am quoting from the latter.

[9] See Montagu 1997 (sixth edition; first edition appeared in 1942), for a classical study of "race" as a (dangerous) myth.

[10] For a critical analysis of the notion of plasticity employed in the 1950 Statement on Race, see Thakkar 2020.

[11] The 1950 Statement on Race was swiftly criticized. UNESCO published a significantly revised statement in 1951, leaving room for the possibility that there are still inherent racial differences. On

end of the story, however. For all practical purposes, the important next step is to study the myth-engendering, ideology-forming, and world-making functions of those concepts. What began as empirically falsifiable concepts of race could morph into notions with respect to which empirical evidence is simply irrelevant. Thus, to borrow Eric Voegelin's distinction between the "race concept" (as used in natural science) and the *political* "idea" of race,[12] hollowing out Kant's supposedly scientific concepts of race will have little effect on the race ideas that might have evolved from them. Such ideas, instead of being corrigible by reality, can create their own reality. Here is how Voegelin characterized the "race idea" in 1940:

> the race idea with its implications is not a body of knowledge organized in systematic form, but a political idea in the technical sense of the word. A political idea does not attempt to describe social reality as it is, but it sets up symbols, . . . it is beside the mark to criticize a symbol, or a set of dogmas, because they are not empirically verifiable. . . . it is not the function of an idea to describe social reality, but to assist in its constitution. (1940: 283–84)[13]

The proposition that the race idea, unlike race concepts, is a symbolic device that does not so much describe as it helps to *make* social reality is an important insight. This insight is missing from the article "Race and Civilization" published along with the 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race, written by the

this point, see Roberts 2011: 43–45. For the politics behind the production of UNESCO's different statements on race, see Selcer 2012.

[12] I thank John Harfouch for drawing my attention to Voegelin's work on race and its relevance to interpreting Kant's racial views (Harfouch 2018: xv–xvii, 106–8, 127–29). Voegelin is best known for his *Rasse und Staat*, published in Tübingen in 1933 (1933a). A decade later, Hannah Arendt praised it as "the best historical account of race-thinking in the pattern of a 'history of ideas' " (1944: 37n2). To this I should add that in 1933 Voegelin also published an important book in Berlin, entitled *Die Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte von Ray bis Carus* (1933b). The first part of this book constructs an eighteenth-century history of race theories that runs through Buffon and Herder and ends with Blumenbach and Kant, with an emphasis on their shared commitment to monogenism (I explained the centrality of monogenism to Kant's raciology in Chapter 4). What makes Voegelin's work relevant here, however, is not just that he has something to say about Kant's place in the history of race thinking. What is most important for my purpose is his insight about how "race" can morph from a theoretical concept—like the one we find in Kant's three essays on race—into a *political* idea that profoundly transforms human relations. It would be a mistake not to heed such an insight when we study Kant's relation to racism.

[13] By citing Voegelin, I do not intend to capture the entirety of his account of race concepts and ideas. For different analyses of Voegelin's rather complex theory of race and his own relation to racism, see Gerolin 2013; Trepanier 2018; Hund 2019.

anthropologist and ethnologist Alfred Métrau. Métrau explains the existence of "race prejudice" in terms of *cognitive* confusions, such as "the inability of most people to make a clear distinction between facts pertaining to civilization and culture on the one hand and biological facts on the other." It is a matter of faulty inference, Métrau suggests, which comes down to mistaking correlation for causation: "As cultural differences are frequently associated with physical differences, the latter have been regarded too often as the cause of the former." This cognitive analysis suggests a cognitive solution: "As regards race, what is needed is . . . scientific data, in view of the fact that the system of race discrimination claims to derive from actual experience and alleged biological laws" (Métrau 1950: 9).

The fact that we, more than seventy years later, are still struggling with racism under evolving guises suggests that the cognitive approach missed the mark.[14] As Dorothy Roberts has demonstrated in the *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-created Race in the Twenty-First Century*, even rigorously trained scientists are not immune to the influence of what the UNESCO Statement dismissed as the "myth of 'race.'" Racial science has found ways to reinvent itself and to merge with modern institutional powers into a "biopolitics of race," whereby genetic explanations of assumed racial differences shape government policies that seem colorblind but are in fact racially discriminatory (2011: x).[15] This new iteration of racial science is in essence no different from the sort we found in Kant's work. What connects the various historical iterations of racial science, according to Roberts, is "the quest to update the theories and methods for dividing human beings into a handful of groups to provide a biological explanation for their differences—from health outcomes to intelligence to incarceration rates" (2011: 27). If this is the case, one cannot help but wonder whether we must reconsider how we understand racial ideology and the racist practices it helps to perpetuate. As Roberts puts it,

> The resilience of racial science raises serious doubts about the efficacy of fresh efforts to debunk it based on more accurate and less prejudiced

[14] For a classical, constantly updated account of the evolving forms of racism in the United States, see Bonilla-Silva 2021. On this account, no racist—let alone cognitively confused—individuals are required for racist arrangements to affect the lives of racialized and systematically discriminated groups.

[15] On the various modern "masks of race," see Goldberg 1993: 61–89. With these evolving guises of race, we can also see new forms of racial knowledge and racialized practices of marginalization (1993: 148–205).

> scientific methods. . . . Race persists neither because it is scientifically valid nor because its invalidity remains to be proven. Race persists because it continues to be *politically useful*. (2011: 79)[16]

So we are circling back to Voegelin's distinction between empirically falsifiable scientific concepts of race and the political idea of race: we are bent on debunking the former, when we should really pay more attention to the latter. In the end, it is about who has *power*—or how much and what kind of power one has—to propagate racial symbols and shape their meanings. I will return to this point later, with the proviso that it does not have to be a bad thing.

Staffan Müller-Wille, whom I quoted in Chapter 4 as an expert in the history of life sciences, makes a similar point by distinguishing two ways of understanding "concept." A concept can be a mental *representation*, which purports to depict a certain object or phenomenon in the world, or a mental *tool*, which "does not somehow mirror its object, but rather serves as an anchoring point for evaluations and judgments." As far as Müller-Wille can tell, the history of "race" has mostly been told as that of a false representational concept. Such a narrative can hardly explain, though, "how a mere delusion or misperception could gain such enormous power over the minds and bodies of many, and thus over the course of history, often with disastrous and outright catastrophic consequences." By contrast, if we understand the concept of race as a tool, this means that "measuring race concepts against their capacity to portray faithfully some presumed reality will often miss the point"; for concepts as tools need not "bear any kind of similarity with the object they are supposed to affect" (2014: 599–600).

This notion of race concepts as tools can also explain why they have exhibited so much staying power over time. For one, race concepts as tools are malleable, which allows them to remain useful by adapting to new contexts. For another, race concepts as tools can, like any other tool, be "employed for purposes and reasons that were alien to those who introduced them initially" (Müller-Wille 2014: 601–2). Müller-Wille illustrates these points with the same kind of observation that Roberts meticulously documented, namely

[16] This point is also salient in the United States Census Bureau's explanation of its five basic racial categories (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander). The Bureau stipulates that these racial categories "generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically." And the race data are collected explicitly for policy and political reasons (https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html, last revised on March 1, 2022; accessed on June 28, 2022).

the resurgence of racial science in "the high-tech contexts of present-day genomics," which has selected its population samples with "an underlying classification scheme" that is structurally similar to the Linnaean—or Kantian for that matter—classification that we encountered in Chapter 4. Meanwhile, racial categories continue to "enter the records and forms that are produced in the context of censuses, public surveys, and immigration procedures" (2014: 602–3). In this way, Müller-Wille arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Roberts: the persistence of "race" has more to do with the ongoing *power struggles* in a given society than with scientifically discoverable facts about nature.

> With race, differences among humans . . . became part and parcel of an epic struggle for domination. Any analysis that misses this ideological thrust of the race concept will fail to understand why it is that this concept can wreak so much havoc. (2014: 603)

And Voegelin would agree with this assessment, insofar as what he called "race idea" roughly correlates with Müller-Wille's notion of race concepts as tools, which anchor and orient us in our social and political relations.

Returning to Kant, we can say that what I told in Chapters 3 and 4 was primarily a history of race concepts in the representational sense. Now I want to switch gears and consider their ideological function as tools. Although I think it is important to show how Kant—given his theoretical commitments as a natural philosopher—sought a groundbreaking biological concept of race, I do not wish to dwell on whether this concept or the philosophical reasoning behind it turned out to be faulty. Such a theoretical scrutiny may still be worthwhile. It is just that, if Voegelin, Roberts, and Müller-Wille were right, the answer would have little impact on a racial ideology that has appropriated race concepts, adapted them to changing historical circumstances, and used them to reinforce existing social and political arrangements or, alternatively, to reshape them.

To be specific, once race concepts—regardless of the authorial intentions of the philosophers who labored on them—have been absorbed into an ideological framework, its semantic content may become moot. Blackness and whiteness, for instance, are barely about skin colors. Rather, each of these has become a symbol for a particular location within a system of social and political relations. One self-identifies or is identified by others as black or white not on account of any scientific fact about one's biological makeup, but

because one lives in a society that has decided to differentiate its members in arbitrarily defined—sometimes legally codified—racial terms.[17] In such a society, each racial identity symbolizes a particular culture, political power (or lack thereof), mental disposition, and so on.[18] The specifics of such symbolic meanings may vary from time to time and from context to context. Presumably, the nascent racial ideology in Kant's days held, at a minimum, that "white equaled free" and "black equaled slave" (Gross 2008: 55).

I explained in Chapter 2 that Kant, both as a formidable philosopher and as an educator with a decades-long teaching career, was well positioned to facilitate the formation of such a racial ideology. The resulting ideology is racist insofar as it systematically denigrates blacks, for instance, and justifies or at least tolerates their enslavement (as we saw in Chapter 4). If Kant's three essays on race added a scientific veneer to the mere association of skin colors with various temperaments and (lack of) talents, the remarks about nonwhites scattered here and there in his lectures and publications can have a more *subliminal* impact on his audiences. In the former case, one can still scrutinize and cognitively engage with the reasoning behind Kant's theory. In the latter case, the impact may well be intractable, as it affects the noncognitive dimension of how people perceive and interact with one another in a racialized world. In this case, Kant's passing remarks about nonwhites often conjure up mocking *imageries* of them.

Kant usually makes such remarks to vivify certain traits that he frowns upon. For example, to illustrate the duty to develop all of one's capacities, Kant offers the image of the South Sea Islander who is more "concerned with devoting his life merely to idleness, amusement, procreation" and thereby "let[s] his talents rust" (GMS, 4: 423). To show what it is like to lack the faculty of foresight, which is "the condition of all possible practice and of the ends to which the human being relates the use of his powers," Kant pictures "the Caribbean who sells his hammock in the morning and in the evening is embarrassed about it because he does not know how he will sleep that night" (Anth, 7: 185–

[17] See Biewen 2017, a fourteen-part documentary podcast series on the history of whiteness. Episode 10 is particularly relevant here, which illustrates how legal codifications of whiteness have less to do with skin color than they reflect the political realities of a society at a given time. For a more thorough scholarly work on this topic, see Painter 2010.

[18] The connection between race and power and so on is the key here. What I am describing is basically what Charles Mills calls a "vertical," as opposed to "horizontal," racial system. In a horizontal system, race has "no present or historical link with political power, economic wealth, cultural influence." A vertical system, by contrast, not only exhibits such structural links but also seeks to regulate, reproduce, and perpetuate them (1998: 43–44).

85).[19] He invokes an image of the Carib again when claiming that, to "enjoy" oneself in the proper sense, one must be able to feel "pain" in the first place. To enjoy oneself, Kant asserts, is to "feel one's life," which is "to feel oneself continuously driven to leave the present state"; thus, "everyone who is attentive to his life and to time"—that is, each of the "cultivated human beings"—suffers from "the oppressive, even frightening arduousness of boredom" (Anth, 7: 233). To disabuse his reader of any wish for a painless life, Kant calls forth the trope of a Carib whose pain-free existence is also a lifeless one.

> Because of his inborn lifelessness, the Carib is free from this arduousness. He can sit for hours with his fishing rod, without catching anything; thoughtlessness is a lack of incentive to activity, which brings pain with it, from which this one is spared. (Anth, 7: 233n.; see V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1291–92, 1336)

Examples like these—besides the imageries of "Negroes," which I documented in Chapter 4, as robust creatures who are full of passions that make them naturally fit for animalistic training—can sneak upon Kant's audiences unawares.

The impressions that Kant's claims about nonwhites could engender or reinforce in his audiences might well become indelible during a historical period when the European man—the German in particular—was in the process of forming his self-image through contrasts with the other.[20] As Susan Shell captures it so well,

> In the absence of an *image* of cosmopolitan perfection . . . the arrested development of the nonwhite races provides tangible evidence that European

[19] Kant likely borrowed his depictions of "Caribs," an indigenous people of South America, from Rousseau's "Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men" or what is known as the "Second Discourse" (2018: 146, 192). Particularly relevant is Rousseau's description of "Caribs"—and "savages" in general—as lacking foresight (2018: 146, 167, 173). But the two philosophers arrived at radically different conclusions about "savages" (Wilson 1998; Lu-Adler 2022b).

[20] We can find an energetic display of this approach in the inaugural lecture on "universal history" that Kant's younger contemporary Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) delivered in 1789. The lecture directly appealed to students and was apparently a great success in this regard. Schiller had read Kant's writings on history, the impact of which was evident in the lecture. It must have left the young men in the audience with an unmistakable impression that what Schiller called "our [white] race," whose self-image as a superior race became clear in the "mirror" constituted by all the other "races contemporary in time but in different geographical areas," could alone propel humanity to its destiny (1972: 325, 328). This, as I explained in Chapter 1, is basically the same impression that Kant's students would get from his lectures on anthropology and physical geography.

> man, at least, is heading in the right direction. The non-European peoples (especially those of Africa and of America) contribute to the achievement of man's moral destiny on Earth . . . in the manner of an inner wasteland, providing an historically emergent humanity with a means of . . . measuring its progress. (2006: 69)

Whether Kant's claims to this effect are true is irrelevant, because they are more rhetorical maneuvers—to warn his audiences against a particular way of being, for instance—than truth-apt utterances about reality. So one would be missing the mark simply to lament that Kant was misinformed and could have known better. As I proposed in Chapter 2, even if he had retracted all the racist claims he ever made, it would have made little difference to the racial and racist ideology that he helped to articulate and shape. His own theory of abstraction—especially regarding the practical difficulty thereof—will support this observation.

## 5.3. Kant on Abstraction, or Why It Is So Hard to Unsee Race

To abstract, according to Kant, is to look away from things that are irrelevant to a given end. In general, he submits, one needs to "ignore, i.e., abstract from some things that are known, but are put aside because they do not pertain to the end." This act of ignoring (*ignoriren*), which is distinct from ignorance (*Unwissenheit*), is deliberate: one *chooses* "not [to] take notice of some circumstances that contribute nothing" to one's purpose (V-Lo/Wiener, 24:837). In other words, to abstract from something presupposes that one *knows* it, only to *look away* from it purposefully.

Abstraction in this sense can be demanding. Kant characterizes it, along with attention, as a way "to become conscious of one's representations." It is "not the mere failure and omission" of attention, however. It is rather "a real act of the cognitive faculty of stopping a representation of which I am conscious from being in connection with other representations in one consciousness" (Anth, 7: 131). So understood, abstraction is more difficult than attention, because "sensibility always gets in my way" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1239).[21] Thus, the ability to abstract "demonstrates a freedom of the

[21] Also see V-Anth/Fried, 25: 489; V-Anth/Busolt, 25: 1449; V-Met/Mron, 29: 878.

faculty of thought and the authority of the mind, *in having the object of one's representations under one's control*" (Anth, 7: 131).

How does Kant's raciology fit into this picture? It depends on whether we see it as a product of his speculative theorizing or in its practical dimension. In the first instance, Kant was aiming at a piece of speculative knowledge, insofar as it treats human beings as animals—as mere creatures of nature—and seeks to understand them in accordance with the demands of natural science. This theoretical investigation requires abstraction on various fronts, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4. First, following the Linnaean paradigm, the investigator of nature (*Naturforscher*) abstracts from the rationality that supposedly makes human beings special, so as to treat them solely as products of nature on a par with other animals. Second, a Kantian philosophical investigator—one who aims to understand phenomena by uncovering their natural causes—needs antecedently determined concepts and principles to guide his investigation. He even needs such concepts and principles "merely in order to *observe*" (GTP, 8: 164; see 8: 161), as "one finds in experience what one needs only if one knows in advance what to look for" (BBM, 8: 91). Thus, he must first cognize those concepts and principles a priori, independently of experience. Third, assuming that only an unfailingly hereditary characteristic can constitute a racial difference, the Kantian investigator ignores all the other ways in which humans differ from or resemble one another by comparison, so as to fix his attention on the one characteristic that he takes to be unfailingly hereditary, namely skin color.

On Kant's account, this kind of philosophical cognition, which requires attentiveness to certain fundamental concepts or rules as mere "object[s] of thoughts" in abstraction from all sensible representations (V-Anth/Busolt, 25: 1482), is entirely beyond the so-called common understanding. The latter is a faculty for cognition *in concreto*. It is contrasted with "speculative understanding," which is a faculty for cognition *in abstracto* (V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 754). The common understanding always "demands an example from experience" for every concept or rule it tries to understand, so much so that it "has a use no further than the extent to which it can see its rules confirmed in experience." The speculative understanding, by contrast, can "have insight into these rules *a priori* and independently of experience" (Prol, 4: 369–70; see Anth, 7: 139–40). To this end, one ignores the empirical applications of a concept or rule, in order that "one gets it *in abstracto* and can better consider it in the universal as a principle" (Log, 9: 45).[22]

[22] The characterization of common understanding in terms of an inability for abstraction also serves as the conceptual basis for Kant's claim that true philosophy, which requires the ability to

The way Kant theorizes about race in his three essays on race clearly illustrates this point. While he occasionally uses reports about human differences gleaned from travel writings, he acknowledges such reports only for their role in "exciting the understanding to investigation." What is more important to him as a philosopher is having "previously determined the concept that one wants to elucidate through observation before questioning experience about it" (BBM, 8: 91). The requisite concept is "race." Kant the philosopher has no need for examples either to determine this concept or to ascertain his rigid division of four principal races. If anything, he might have made concerted efforts to look away from concrete examples had they been presented to him. His critic Georg Forster understood him well by suggesting that he would have *demonstrated away* any empirical facts that did not fit his system (2013: 150). And Kant behaved exactly as Forster predicted: he decided to exclude all data collected about islanders as irrelevant to his racial-classificatory system, after Forster pointed out discrepancies between his system and actual field reports about South Sea Islanders (GTP, 8: 177–78).

If Kant the speculative philosopher thus abstracts too much in theorizing about race, Kant the pragmatic teacher may end up with students who abstract too little when they encounter the racialized others. Concepts, as framing devices by which we navigate the complex world, can subtly influence our attention and affect how we perceive others and even ourselves. Some of them may, through socialization and habituation, become the default *lens* through which we see the world, so much so that it is extraordinarily difficult to abstract from the resulting perceptions at will. Kant recognizes that the "faculty of abstraction is a strength of mind that can only be acquired through practice" (Anth, 7: 132). Some people, he laments, suffer from an inability to "sufficiently abstract from certain secondary things to attend to principal things," wherefore they become "unhappy." An example is a man who wants to marry and finds an admittedly virtuous woman but cannot look away from her "damned pockmarks" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1240).

Now enter race concepts. Consider the university students—young white men—who attended Kant's lectures on physical geography and anthropology. Recall that, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, he intended those lectures to give his students, first, the world knowledge (*Weltkenntnis*) they supposedly needed in order to be effective players on the world stage and, second,

cognize things *in abstracto*, could only have originated with the Greeks (Log, 9: 27). We will investigate this claim in Chapter 6.

an understanding of what they could make of themselves in accordance with their natural endowments, which he presented as unevenly distributed along the racial lines. The students would learn about nonwhites mostly in terms of various incapacities and traits to be frowned upon (for example, laziness and childish passions). As a result, if they encountered "Negroes," for instance, they would see more than just black skin. Blackness would serve as the symbolic proxy for an entire racial profile of the "Negro" race that the eminent Professor Kant had helped to construct.

Even if the young men later realized that Kant's race concepts turned out to be referentially empty, such a realization would probably do little to stop those concepts from anchoring, at least subconsciously, their perceptions of and relations to the racialized others. Try as they might, they would still find it practically impossible not to see a black person in terms of the negative qualities that they had developed a *learned habit* of attaching to blackness. Of course, reality itself is only a continuum of shades with imperceptible transitions from one shade to the next, so that Kant's fourfold racial taxonomy is hardly applicable in some circumstances. The common understanding, which is the operative faculty in social interactions, will seek *examples* for the rigid racial categories regardless. Now that the entire humanity has been exhaustively divided in racial terms, the reflective faculty associated with common understanding will, when the occasion arises, explicitly or implicitly bring each encountered human being under one or another race concept. Even in cases where it is extremely difficult to determine a person's race based on skin color, the reflective mind may not rest until it can make at least an arbitrary decision. This happens, as we shall see in section 5.4, especially in contexts where such decisions carry high *stakes*.[23]

Meanwhile, we should note that some nonwhites had long lived in societies dominated by white people—domination in terms of power if not population—by the time Kant published his last essay on race (1788). He even mentioned a few categories of them: the "*gypsies* found among us, of whom it is established that they are *Indians* in terms of their phyletic origination" (BBM, 8: 105; see GTP, 8: 172, 174), the "Negroes who have long resided" in France (BBM, 8: 92), the "Creole *Negroes* [*creolischen Neger*]" in the West Indies (GTP, 8: 174), and the "Negro *Creoles* [*Neger-kreolen*] in North America" (BBM, 8: 105).[24] How would such people perceive themselves in

[23] See Willadsen-Jensen and Ito 2015 for a modern, neural-scientific study of how reactions to people with racially ambiguous faces are particularly susceptible to contextual influences.

[24] For Kant, "Creole" simply marks the birthplace of a person, namely the French colonies in the West Indies and parts of North America. This is evident from his claim that "the French or English

a society dominated by another people, who had denigrated, exploited, and oppressed them? Might their self-consciousness be affected by the racial lens through which the white Europeans saw them? Although Kant would not consider such questions (because this would not serve any of his philosophical aims), he has illuminating conceptual points to make about the perils of turning attention to oneself in society.

On Kant's account, attention and abstraction are, properly speaking, voluntary and intentional efforts to become conscious of one's representations. Distraction, by contrast, is involuntary. If abstraction manifests "a freedom of the faculty of thought and the authority of the mind, *in having the object of one's representations under one's control*," distraction is the exact opposite. It is "the mere failure" of attention, namely an inability to control one's attention and orient it at will toward what one should pay attention to (Anth, 7: 131; see V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 776; V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1045–46). Distraction in this sense becomes particularly hazardous, Kant claims, when it comes down to inappropriately turning attention to oneself in a social context. He speaks harshly of people who are distracted in this way. Singling out "ladies," he says:

> when they are distracted, then either they are in love or *something else of the sort is ruling them*. . . . Human beings who have this sort of subtle distraction and always build castles in the air, are of no use in society and are harmful and a burden on society. Such people are commonly considered the fools of society. (V-Anth/Busolt, 25: 1483, emphasis added)

The italicized phrase captures the involuntary nature of distraction. It also suggests why distraction as an involuntary attention to oneself is allegedly "harmful"—not only to the society but also to oneself. Such distraction is "annoying and painful," Kant claims, and can only weaken one's "mental powers." It is an "observation of oneself" that makes one "unnatural," because one observes oneself "as one appears to others [*in den Sinnen andrer erscheint*]" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1220). This kind of self-observation can, Kant adds, "easily lead to enthusiasm and madness." The contrary state is that of "*ease* (an *air dégage*): a self-confidence that one's behavior will not be judged unfavorably by others" (Anth, 7: 132).

*Creole* in the West Indies, who looks pallid and exhausted," cannot be "counted among different classes of the human species because of this." For this Creole, if brought up *in Europe*, would be "indistinguishable from the inhabitants of our part of the world" (BBM, 8: 92).

Now imagine the "Negroes" in France or in any other part of Europe during the eighteenth century. Whiteness being the norm, it is hard to imagine a black person not being a constant object of others' attention (recall that for Kant a "Negro" is someone who is *truly* black). As Kant puts it, "every deviation from the rule involuntarily fastens human beings to an object," to which "our eyes are involuntarily drawn" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1240). Meanwhile, by the time Kant wrote about the "Negroes" in France in the 1780s, the Code Noir, which codified the Europeans' denigrating assumptions about and objectifications of this so-called race, had been around for an entire century (since 1685) and thoroughly implemented in the French colonies in the West Indies and North America.[25] Against this backdrop, one feeling that can beset a "Negro" living in a white supremacist society is what Kant calls "shame." This feeling comes with a "fear of disrespect" *by others*. Thus, one "will not be ashamed in the dark, but only in the presence of others who can observe him in whatever light he should present himself" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1348). By Kant's analysis, such a human being lacks enough "confidence in oneself to appear dignified [*würdig*] in the eyes of others." He associates this lack of self-confidence with a propensity (*Hang*) toward self-examination that may have come from upbringing or from the feeling that, in comparison with others, one falls short (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1352; see V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 807–8).

Such claims betray a white man's blind spots, to put it charitably, due to his privileged social location. A "Negro" cannot be at ease in a white supremacist society, just as a woman cannot be at ease in a patriarchal one.[26] Being at ease in such societies is the white man's privilege. The woman, as soon as she becomes aware of the society's male gaze, which measures her worth by her suitability for marriage, involuntarily turns her attention to herself—her appearance and manners to be precise. The "Negro," as soon as he grows conscious of the society's white gaze, which sees him as a robust animal full of passions but no finer qualities of the mind, may likewise involuntarily turn his attention to himself. He cannot just *be*, because others will not let him be. The situation may be compounded, as we shall see in the character William "the Negro" in section 5.5, if this "Negro" has at the same time been taught certain Enlightenment ideals: the voice of his *reason* tells him that he is as

[25] For the French original and English translation of the 1724 edition of the Code Noir (enacted for the French Louisiana), see Palmer 2012: 163–91.

[26] See Orgad and Gill 2021 for a penetrating critique of the so-called confidence culture, which asks women to cultivate self-confidence while ignoring the unjust social, economic, and political structures that hold them back. A parallel point can be made about historically marginalized and denigrated races.

worthy as any other human being simply on account of his humanity; as a result, he will struggle mightily between considering himself in abstraction from his racial identity and seeing himself from the white other's perspective. In the latter case, no white person needs to be literally present. Seeing oneself in a mirror, for example, will suffice to trigger an involuntary *imagination* of the white gaze. One will thus constantly—maddeningly—waver between affirming the dignity of one's own humanity and suspecting that one falls short of it.

William will not get out of this quandary by abstracting from or ignoring his racial identity, as a Kantian might recommend. Fischer, the novelist who constructed William "the Negro" with an emphatic attention to the character's racial (self-)identity, was evidently sensitive to a practical consequence of racialization that Kant could not appreciate: in a racialized world, our perceptions of both others and ourselves may be inevitably and irrevocably affected by race concepts. Kleist's novella reflects an awareness of this new social reality as well. The difference is that, whereas Kleist will alert us to the utterly tragic nature of such a reality, Fischer's William will gesture toward a more hopeful response: instead of being involuntarily distracted by an identity and the associated sense of inferiority that others have imposed on him, he will actively embrace his "Negro" identity and insist on playing an agential role *as a black man* in bringing about a future when his race is free. In this struggle against racial injustices, he cannot afford to be colorblind as an abstract-minded Kantian might urge him to.

## 5.4. Kleist: "Kant Crisis" and the Tragic Trap of Racialization

Kleist is known for many things—a short suffering life "in dreary, difficult times" (as his epitaph describes it),[27] a trove of literary productions that have intrigued readers to this day, and a self-reported "Kant crisis" that inspired lasting scholarly debates. This crisis and its manifestation in Kleist's *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* (1811; "Betrothal" for short, referring to its English translation in Kleist 1997: 324–50), in which racialization plays the pivotal role, will be my focus in this section.

[27] For the English translation of the entire epitaph, see Leiter 1982: 563.

In a letter to his fiancée in March 1801, Kleist wrote that one idea of the so-called Kantian philosophy had a particularly shattering effect on him, so much so that he felt "wounded deep in [his] innermost life by it" (1997: 422). He illustrated the idea as follows.

> If people all had green lenses instead of eyes they would be bound to think that the things they see through them *are* green—and they would never be able to decide whether the eye shows them things as they are or whether it isn't adding something to them belonging not to them but to the eye. It is the same with our minds. We cannot decide whether what we call truth is truly truth or whether it only seems so to us. (1997: 421)

Scholars have debated about which, if any, of Kant's works Kleist had in mind or, as the crisis stemmed from an interpretation of Kantian epistemology, whether Kleist actually misinterpreted Kant.[28] These exegetical issues are moot, however, when the question is about the *reception* of Kant's philosophy. What matters here is how Kleist understood what *he* took to be certain ideas of the Kantian philosophy.

At any rate, Kleist seems to be right about the basic Kantian insight regarding how human beings know the world: we cannot know the world as it is in itself, but only *as it appears to us*; how the world appears to us depends on the nature of our sensibility, which is a merely passive or receptive faculty; how we synthesize the given appearances into concept-laden perceptions depends both on the pure concepts of our understanding (or categories, such as "cause" and "effect") and on the relevant empirical concepts (for example, "dog"); and, finally, whether or how we incorporate such perceptions into a systematic worldview depends on the interests, ideas, and principles of our reason. To use Kleist's metaphor, we inevitably see the world from a *perspective* determined by a certain cognitive apparatus, as though through a pair of glasses. To continue with the Kantian language, two kinds of such apparatus determine the particular features of the glasses. First, there are pure elements such as the forms of intuitions (space and time) and the categories, which constitute the necessary, a priori conditions of our cognition in general. Second, we need empirical concepts, which are contingent and acquired a posteriori, in order to have specific cognitions. Such contingent concepts

[28] On Kleist's relation to Kant's philosophy, see Brodsky 2013; Mehigan 2011; Gray 2019: 96–97n3–4 (a review of the literature on Kleist's "Kant crisis").

determine the tint, so to speak, of Kleist's metaphoric glasses, making the world appear in this or that color.

Calling the empirical concepts contingent does not mean that it is totally up to each individual to decide which concepts to use in a given context. We often obtain concepts and become acquainted with their connotations and applications by being situated in a given social context. This is especially the case with race concepts. How one perceives the racialized others and regulates one's relation to them largely depends on how one, depending on where one is located and how one is socialized in a racialized world, has learned to use the relevant race concepts. Most likely, in eighteenth-century Europe and its plantation colonies, concepts like "Negro" and "white man" carried with them all sorts of connotations beyond skin color, including assumptions about each race's social position and moral character. Such connotations might never get activated in one's mind, however, unless one actually encountered the racialized others in a space where racial identifications *mattered*. The "Betrothal" is a dramatic demonstration of this point.

Before I delve into this novella, I should acknowledge that it can be read in many ways, partly due to uncertainties about the authorial intention.[29] I will narrowly focus on how racial (self-)identifications tragically determine the lead characters' fate. I begin by introducing all four main characters, who represent different skin colors and therefore different lived experiences. These experiences in turn affect how they navigate a racialized world.

The novella is set in "Port au Prince, in that part of the island belonging to the French [Saint-Domingue],[30] at the beginning of this [nineteenth] century when the blacks were murdering the whites." It was the year 1803, at the height of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). Port au Prince was the last remaining stronghold of the French power on the island and hence the last retreat for the whites. Kleist begins by describing the "terrifying" old black man Congo Hoango. This man was kidnapped from the Gold Coast of Africa. Having saved his master's life at one point, he was set free by the master, who

[29] The "Betrothal" has been widely studied. To sample a few different angles, see Kontje 1999; Martin 2008; Niekerk 2013; Byrd 2017; Gray 2019.

[30] Although Saint-Domingue (later Haiti) and Santo Domingo (later the Dominican Republic) were differentiated as the French- and Spanish-controlled parts of the island once called Hispaniola, for a while "Santo Domingo" also referred to the entire island. Kleist apparently had this broader usage in mind. On the history of the island, see San Miguel 2005, which also shows how contrasting racial identities of the two parts of the island, with the Dominicans' tendency to emphasize their *white* Spanish roots, have shaped tensions between and different fates of Haiti and the Dominican Republic to this day.

also gifted him a house and a mulatta (Babekan) as a companion, appointed him as manager of the estate, and made him a legal beneficiary.[31] None of this mattered, however, when the revolution started and a "general orgy of vengeance flar[ed] up on those plantations." Now Hoango remembered only "the tyranny which had torn him away from his native land." Having assembled an armed band of blacks to assist the "struggle against the whites," he hunted down and attacked the whites with an "inhuman lust for vengeance" (Kleist 1997: 324–25).[32]

On the opposite of the color spectrum is Gustav. He is an officer in the French army, although he is a Swiss native, not a Frenchman.[33] With an extended family in tow, he has just escaped Fort Dauphin, where "all the whites have been murdered." With the rest of his family hiding in the woods a mile away, he now ventures out in the dark of the night, risking his own life, to seek food and shelter for them. He comes upon the roadside house that belongs to none other than Hoango, who happens to be away (1997: 327–28).

The next two characters bring more complexities into the picture, partly due to their gender and partly due to the ambiguity of their racial identities. Babekan, who Gustav judges to be "a mulatto and, what is more, of African origin" (1997: 328), has a white father. According to the Code Noir, which stipulates that a child's status is determined by the mother's (articles IX and X, in Palmer 2012: 168–69), Babekan must be born a slave. This is reflected in the fact that she still suffers the consumption that resulted from "a cruel punishment meted out to her when she was still young" (1997: 325; see 330–31). Babekan's and her daughter Toni's gender and proximity to whiteness explain the roles that Hoango has them play. Basically, if during his absences white refugees come to their house for food and shelter, their job is to charm and

[31] The Code Noir (article LIII) commands "manumitted persons to show a singular respect towards their former masters, to their widows and their children; in such way that insults given to them be punished more severely than if it was done to another person" (Palmer 2012: 189).

[32] Jennifer Mensch has pointed out to me that the name "Congo Hoango" would remind a knowing reader of Cugoano, whom I mentioned in section 5.1. Those who are familiar with Cugoano's arguments in his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (first published in 1787) will recognize some traces of those arguments in the "Betrothal."

[33] This detail about Gustav's national identity, together with the fact that the story in the "Betrothal" took place in the year 1803, may hold the key to appreciating the complexities of the novella and the extent to which its ending is tragic. In February 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte issued the *Acte de Médiation* to dissolve the Swiss Helvetic Republic (1798–1803), which was established shortly after the French invasion of Switzerland. A new Swiss Confederation was introduced in its stead (it was to last until 1815). Switzerland's long-standing policy of neutrality was nominally recognized (on the history of Swiss neutrality, see Sherman 1918). But the renewed agreement of defensive alliance between the two countries would oblige Swiss mercenaries and military officers, mostly drawn from the lower strata of the society (Casparis 1982), to fight for France during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15).

delay them until his return, at which point "immediate death" will be their fate. In Toni's case, her even lighter complexion makes her "particularly serviceable in this hideous ruse." Given that the white refugees will most likely be men, this means that Toni, as Babekan encourages her, is to "allow their visitors every intimacy, except the last" (1997: 325).

It is against this backdrop that Gustav arrives at the house on a dark night. It is particularly telling that, when Babekan answers the door, Gustav's first question is "Are you a negress?" And Babekan's response is to assure Gustav that he has nothing to fear, since she is "a mulatto" and her daughter, the only other person living in the house, is "a mestiza" (1997: 325). Babekan will continue to play off the fact that she and Toni are partly white. To lower Gustav's guard even further, she claims that her fate, being perceived as one of the "white and creole mongrels," is just as precarious as his in the face of the vengeful blacks, suggesting the tantalizing possibility that she is sympathetic to the Europeans on account of her white lineage (1997: 328).

Meanwhile, Gustav plays the race card on his own terms (another possibility is that he is simply naïve). For instance, he tells Babekan: "to you I can entrust myself. There is in the colour of your face a glimmer of my own colour, and it shines forth at me" (1997: 327). He flatters her as one of the "kindhearted people who do not share in the hatred and savagery beyond belief that have seized all the inhabitants of the island" (1997: 328). He invokes "Heaven that loves compassion and human kindness" in an attempt to talk her into thinking that she, with the hospitality she has already shown him, will also be kind enough to lodge his extended family in this house (1997: 329). Babekan is too shrewd for this, of course. If Gustav at times appears to be naïve about his situation, she believes that the truth is otherwise. "The gentleman would have been foolish to enter the house before ascertaining what race its inhabitants belonged to," she says to Toni. On the contrary, she speculates, "in his imagination . . . there was nothing but blackamoors and negroes and if a lady from Paris or Marseilles had opened the door for him still he would have taken her for a black" (1997: 330). Babekan is therefore poised to out-maneuver Gustav with her own scheme (1997: 336).

Toni seems ready to trust Gustav, however. If, in her mother's eyes, her proximity to whiteness makes her a most useful seductress, to Toni this proximity suggests the fluidity of her racial identity. She is primed to see herself as white, as she eventually will declare herself to be. Gustav nudges her toward this white self-identity with two contrasting stories, which associate blackness and whiteness with diametrically opposed moral characters. The

first story is about a young "negress" who avenged her former master's ill treatment of her by seducing him and infecting him with her yellow fever. Gustav askes Toni whether *she* is capable of such an "especially terrible" deed. Having received a "no" from Toni, as well as Babekan's affected abhorrence at the story, Gustav righteously declares that "there could be no justification, however tyrannous the whites had been, for an act of such base and abominable deceit" (1997: 331–32).

Gustav tells the second story while he is alone with Toni. He finds her exceedingly beautiful except for the color of her skin, which is "repellent" to him (1997: 333). He soon professes that Toni bears a "wonderous resemblance" to his late fiancée named Marianne Congreve. He portrays Marianne as an angelic white heroine, whose death has allegedly taught him "the epitome of all goodness and excellence." She died during the French Revolution at the hands of "the fearful Revolutionary Tribunal," Gustav relates, all to save him from their prosecution. His show of grief and regret moves Toni, who is now overcome by a "human feeling." This newfound emotional bond—on Toni's part at least—leads to the betrothal referenced in the novella's title (1997: 334–35).

Now Toni is squarely on Gustav's side. She angrily protests her mother's "wicked plot" and defends Gustav as "the best and noblest of men and surely not a party to whatever wrongs the blacks may accuse his race of" (at this point, you may recall Cugoano's view, which I mentioned in section 5.1, that the white Europeans who were not directly involved in slavery were no more innocent than those who were). And she extends her sense of indignity to all the "inhuman" acts in which she has participated. Those acts, she claims, have long offended her "innermost feelings." Now she "would rather die ten times over" than let any harm be done to Gustav while he is in this house (1997: 336–37). Knowing her mother's unrelenting hatred for the white race, however, Toni immediately realizes that she must retract those words and find ways to out-maneuver Babekan in order to save her betrothed (1997: 337–41).

The plot is then complicated by Hoango's unexpected early return. Toni figures that the best way to save Gustav is to tie him up and prevent him from a doomed one-man confrontation with Hoango's men (1997: 342–44). This allows her to buy time before the arrival of Gustav's family (she has sent for them). All along, Toni gladly entertains the idea of "dying in this attempt to save him" (1997: 344), just as Gustav's late fiancée did. This resolve to save Gustav's life even at the cost of her own comes not only from the love she feels

for him but also from a newfound sense of *racial alliance*. When Babekan later calls her "contemptible and treacherous," Toni replies: "I did not betray you; *I am a white* . . .; I belong to the race you are in open warfare with" (1997: 347, emphasis added). This was not how Toni identified herself earlier in the novella, when she asked Gustav how the whites had incurred so much hatred on this island (1997: 331). It was her subsequent conversations with Gustav, she later tells his family, that changed everything "beyond all understanding" (1997: 345).

The tragedy is that Gustav does not see Toni as white and so can never truly trust her or believe the sincerity of her professed love for him, especially since his very life is at stake. When she tied him up in an attempt to save him from himself, he did not give her any benefit of doubt. Now he feels betrayed by her appearance of innocent love and thinks she is in truth only a "whore" seducing him on behalf of her black race. When his cousins, with Toni's strategic assistance, finally manage to free him and when Toni enters his room with his uncle, he fires a shot that goes straight through her heart without giving anybody a chance to explain the situation. When he then learns the truth and Toni utters her bidding words "You should not have mistrusted me," he finds this unbearable and blows his own brains out with the same pistol with which he killed her (1997: 348–49).

What did Kleist wish to signal with such a violent and tragic ending for the two lead characters? Was he being pessimistic about the prospect of a union between a white person and someone not perceived as such by others in a racially antagonizing world, so that they could be united only in death? Toward the end of the novella, Gustav's family would dig a grave in Saint-Domingue, exchange Gustav's and Toni's rings to symbolize their union, and bury their bodies in "the adobe of eternal peace." And Gustav's uncle would, in the year 1807,[34] erect a monument "among the bushes of his garden" near Mount Rigi to commemorate Gustav and the "faithful Toni" as his bride (1997: 349–50). As Kleist, a very intentional writer, ended his novella with this detail, what did he mean to convey? Maybe he chose Switzerland because, unlike France or England, it was not an imperial colonizer and had long been committed to neutrality. Although more recent historians have revealed a far less flattering history of Switzerland's relation to colonialism in the eighteenth and

[34] It is again historically meaningful that Kleist chose 1807 as the year when a monument would be erected for Gustav and Toni. Early that year, Britain and the United States each passed an act to abolish their country's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Ending the novella with a reference to 1807 suggests a sense of hope, then.

nineteenth centuries,[35] Kleist might be operating with the Swiss myth that held sway in some German intellectual circles at the time. According to this myth, Switzerland was the land of sublime nature, idyllic country life, supreme morality, and political liberty (Hentschel 2002). If so, Kleist must have made a deliberate move to locate Gustav's and Toni's monument by Mount Rigi, at the somewhat secluded heart of Switzerland far away from the bordering countries (including France).

If, on this interpretation, Kleist's novella ends with a glimmer of hope, it remains unclear what the hoped-for state of existence amounts to in terms of race relations. So far as I can tell, Toni's racial identity never appeared to be an issue to Gustav's uncle or cousins, who trusted her account of what transpired in Hoango's house and followed her plan without doubting for a moment whether it might be a trap. Their grief for and remembrance of Toni's death came across as entirely genuine. The things they did to enshrine her eternal union with Gustav suggested a heartfelt acceptance of and respect for her. Did they thereby affirm her self-proclaimed white identity? Or was it that, unlike Gustav, they never wondered about her racial identity at all? As a third alternative, they might have seen her as who she was (a mestiza) but, in the Kantian terms I introduced in section 5.3, *abstracted from* this fact as irrelevant to her character or her capacity to love a white man.

These alternatives point to three distinct scenarios. The first represents a Eurocentric vision of a future when the peaceful union is between the whites, be the white identity literal (represented by Gustav) or self-constructed and then affirmed by the whites (Toni). The second scenario is characterized by some sort of colorblindness, which fits with the above-mentioned Swiss myth: Gustav's uncle and nephew may represent a worldview not yet distorted by the racial lens. Their presence in Saint-Domingue makes this blissful innocence unlikely, though. The third scenario is where one sees race but can look away through a conscious effort, so that the recognition of another person's racial identity does not distract one from what one ought to focus on in assessing that person's character or trustworthiness. This need to look away is what Gustav failed to do in his relation with Toni, a failure that

[35] Just because Switzerland did not have its own colonies, it does not follow that it was not implicated in European colonialism. Recent scholars have argued that Switzerland practiced "colonialism without colonies" through deep *economic* involvements (for an overview of the relevant debates, see Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné 2015). It was entangled with the slave trade and the plantation economy primarily through its textile industry, which made it one of the largest importers of cotton, and through its financial investments in slave trading companies (Fässler 2005; David et al. 2005).

doomed them both. If Gustav's uncle and cousins could nevertheless accomplish the needed abstraction, there is still hope.

Of course, we can never be certain about the authorial intention behind Kleist's decision to end the novella the way he did. Part of the reason, I suspect, is that we cannot help but see the author of the "Betrothal" as a white European man writing about the Haitian Revolution at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the racist world order was about to become even more entrenched.[36] This fact can influence how one reads the novella. Is it, by the final analysis, racist or antiracist?[37] Who knows! Maybe Kleist expected this interpretive uncertainty, which is plausible given his "Kant crisis." Once the glasses with which we see the world have been racially tinted, we cannot even be sure how to interpret a work like the "Betrothal" without wanting to know the author's racial identity. Presumably, we would read various parts of the text differently depending on whether we are told the author is black, white, or racially mixed.

It is also likely that Kleist did not mean to indicate any vision about the future in *this world*, be it an optimistic or a pessimistic one. The novella's final stop at a modest family garden by Mount Rigi might simply suggest that he felt exhausted by the tragically confusing and antagonizing world around him and longed to retreat into the quiet simplicity of nature, not the so-called civilization. This romanticist retreat leaves behind the "unhappy island" of Saint-Domingue (1997: 327), which can be seen as emblematic of all the curses on humanity unleashed by the toxic blend of racialization and the European powers' insatiable imperialist ambitions and capitalist greed.[38] By having Gustav's and Toni's *bodies* buried on that troubled island and a monument erected for the union of their *souls* near the idyllic Mount Rigi, Kleist left intact the duality of racialized bodies and the souls that strive to be free and to love without the worldly hindrance of racial perceptions. We will get an entirely different prospect in Fischer's novella.

[36] 1803 was also the year France sold Louisiana to the United States, a transaction—known as the Louisiana Purchase—that was presumably prompted by the Haitian Revolution. In this way, the victory of black (and mixed-race) Haitians ironically helped to further slavery in the United States and delay the emancipation of slaves in this part of the world (Thomson 2000).

[37] When I had a class of sixteen philosophy majors read the novella, they were all fixated on this question. Most of them interpreted the text as racist in light of the fact that Kleist was a white man. For a thoughtful overview of different scholarly approaches to this issue, see Martin 2008: 48–50.

[38] On Kleist's relation to German Romanticism, see Silz 1929; Mehigan 2016.

## 5.5. *William der Neger*: The Double Consciousness of a "Negro"

Fischer's novella, like Kleist's, can be interpreted from multiple angles. For instance, one can read it in light of the background debates about miscegenation (Little 1998). Or one can foreground the parts that reflect Fischer's critique of the prevailing gender ideology, a running theme of her major works (Purver 1995; Tautz 2008; Harms 2013). One can also show how her view of gender relations intersects with racial politics (Kontje 1999). My analysis will focus on the title character William's evolving self-consciousness *as a black man*, which affects both how he interprets his love interest Molly's feelings for him and what he decides to do with his life.

The novella revolves around three main characters. To start with William, Fischer's depiction of him partly reflects the trope of passionate "Negroes," the Kantian version of which we already encountered in Chapter 4. Unlike Kant, however, Fischer romanticizes William's passionate temperament and his intuitive connection to all that is natural. Whereas Kant associated blackness with stupidity, Fischer ascribes to William "the Negro" an extraordinary degree of intelligence: once given the opportunity to study, he "soon left his white classmates far behind in schoolwork" and even "several of his teachers soon found themselves left in his wake" (Fischer 1990: 355–56).[39] Moreover, while Kant often simply described blacks as "transplanted" from their equatorial climate to the New World and showed little concern about how they were uprooted from their African motherland in the first place, Fischer does the opposite. She introduces William as someone who was violently kidnapped as a child with his sister by six white men, cruelly separated from her, forced onto a slave ship, and sold first to a Spanish master and then to his current English master (1990: 355).

Fischer lets this new master, Sir Robert, appear as a rational and noble-minded gentleman (as befits the name "Robert"). His persona is that of "a declared enemy of the despicable slave trade." In a way, William is his project. Alluding to the end of the Haitian Revolution in 1804, he hopes that "William's brothers in the rest of America would not have to bear it much longer either." Assuming that the abolitionist struggle in America lacks "educated leaders," he seeks to prepare William for the leadership. William

[39] The German original of *William der Neger* is in Fischer 1818. It is translated as "William the Negro" in Fischer 1990. I will refer to the translation while consulting the German original.

responds in kind: his "impassioned spirit" seizes upon and will not let go of the thought of leading his race in the struggle for universal emancipation. This characterization reflects the root meaning of his name: he is meant to be a strong-willed protector or warrior.[40] Above all, he feels a "burning need" to provide his brothers with the "deep pleasure the sciences afforded him" and "to free them from their interminable and despicable yoke" (1990: 356–57).

The characters of both William and Sir Robert develop more fully through their relations to Molly, whose name opens the novella. Fischer introduces Molly as the beautiful eleventh child from a family of modest means, who is neglected by her parents and bullied by her siblings. Her interlocutors are natural objects, things that her siblings regard as "lifeless." She is attuned to every movement of nature. This natural harmony is also reflected in her approach to music, which she uses to express her true feelings when she is alone. This private love of nature underwrites the *instinctual* affinity that Molly initially felt toward William. It was a passionate first encounter: Molly was "deeply and passionately . . . moved by the intimate music of this soul" of William's; and William, kneeling in front of her, "passionately beat his breast, and touched his brow to the earth." When he asked Molly for one of her "divine songs" (he had been eavesdropping on her music), she sang one of her "most secret songs" expressing a sense of harmony with nature. The allusion to a passionate black man's closeness to nature does not stop here. Fischer describes William's subsequent narrative of his life in a pictorial manner, as a "painting . . . sketched with tropic ardor, each word an image, each image pressing on her soul with gripping vitality" (1990: 354–57).[41]

The passionate alliance between Molly and William is not meant to last. William's love, being the love of a "noble and spirited" black man, is a "holy, consuming fire." The cool-headed Sir Robert has the "common sense" to suspect "a tragic outcome." He is nevertheless willing to play along when William proposes a betrothal and Molly agrees. What matters is that William

[40] Fischer is evidently intentional in her choice of names for the main characters. William would later write about his decision to let go of his love interest: "What is it in that name [of mine]? Will William become weak now?" (Fischer 1990: 365).

[41] Although a reader today may balk at yet another trope of African sensibility, one should consider what Fischer does with such a trope as opposed to how Kant, for instance, did with the same. To Kant, as I shall explain in Chapter 6, the pictorial mode of representation ascribed to all nonwhites means a hereditary *lack* of some crucial capacities, such as the capacity to form abstract thoughts, and this supposed lack prevents them from playing any agential role in human progress. Fischer's novella suggests a fundamentally different view: the passionate "Negro" represents life, vitality, harmony with nature, and authenticity, and he is entirely capable of taking ownership of his own future *as a black man*.

is energized thereby to work even harder in his studies. Sir Robert's abolitionist project now takes Molly into its equation: even if the union of the two lovers is "to the disadvantage of the poor little creature herself," her "sacrifice," as long as it makes William happy and motivated, is "needed for the great task" of liberating an entire people (1990: 358–59). If Molly is "not happy at all" due to how her parents treated her, Sir Robert reasons to himself, at least William is (1990: 361).

William's double consciousness (to be explained in next paragraph) would eventually get in the way, though. He started seeing, judging, and doubting himself because of his race even when he was still an "invisible listener" of Molly's private music. Again and again, he was discouraged from revealing himself to her by the sight of "his own black face" reflected in the brook. He would "hid[e] his black face in his hands," as though to make it disappear. He would cry out to himself: "Alas, why am I black! Molly, you divine white girl!" (1990: 355). Seeing himself as a black man in the imaginary eyes of a white other, William struggles to retain the confidence in his own worth. After confessing to her that he has lost his once single-minded focus on the task of liberating his people in America because all he can think of now is her, he says: "Why am I black? When you, Molly, are so heavenly white!" Once again, he hides his face in his hands. This gesture of shame is then countered by a desire to affirm his worth. Appearing "even taller than before," he continues:

> Must I despair? . . . Will I never be allowed to raise my eyes to Molly? Yes, I am black! But am I not a man?[42] Don't I have a heart? . . . If I liberate my brothers, teach them to love and to follow the sciences, the arts, and human law, am I worth nothing? Molly! Am I worth nothing? (1990: 358)

Even Molly's vow of love and commitment cannot quiet William's doubts. On the day of their betrothal, officiated by Sir Robert, William catches the sight of himself in a large mirror and loathes what he sees.

> Alas, he saw his own figure like that of an animal on its hind legs, standing next to that of the magnificent white man and the divine young girl. His arm sank . . . and soon thereafter he had time enough to cast himself to the

[42] This proposition alludes to the motto of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded in 1787. The motto in its entirety is "Am I Not a Man and a Brother" (for discussion, see Oldfield 1998: 155–84).

> ground in the garden and pressing his face and his heart to mother earth, weep out that feeling for which he yet had no name. (1990: 361)

What the self-image in the mirror suggested to William was that "nature did not make him for that heavenly white girl" (1990: 365).

It can be illuminating to read William's episodic doubts about his self-worth as an example of the Du Boisian double consciousness. The best-known version of this concept appears in the opening chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* (first published in 1903), "Of Our Spiritual Strivings."[43]

> The Negro is . . . born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 2018: 7)[44]

The two-ness felt by William is that of an Englishman and a "Negro." In this case, the tension between two selves is multilayered. To begin with, there seems to be a basic tension between William's *passionate* soul, which is intuitively connected to mother earth, and his *rational* mind, which exalts sciences and strives for the Enlightenment ideal of freedom and equality. These are also respective locations of *love* and *knowledge*. Then there is a further tension within the knowing mind: William's truth-seeking reason recognizes the gap between the Enlightenment *ideals* of freedom and equality and the *reality* that his "Negro" kin are oppressed and unfree. It is not lost to him that, in spite of having an abolitionist patron who treats him like a father does his son, theirs is technically still a master–slave relation. His standing in the racially hegemonic world is inescapably tied to his "Negro" identity, no matter how much kindness and respect the white individuals in his immediate circle

[43] A slightly different version of this chapter appeared in 1897 under the title "The Strivings of the Negro People," published in *The Atlantic* magazine (reproduced in Du Bois 2014: 67–75). In the same year Du Bois published another seminal essay, "The Conservation of Races" (2014: 51–65).

[44] For detailed, contextualized analyses of Du Bois's account of double consciousness, see Gooding-Williams 2009: 66–95; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020: 27–61.

show him. This fact is the source of William's double consciousness, whereby he cannot help but look at himself *through the eyes of others* and measure his worth from a viewpoint that regards his race with contempt or at best with pity. Accordingly, while he knows that he should be accorded unconditional worth simply in virtue of his humanity, he also knows that in reality he has to prove his worth through struggles, *as a black man*, alongside his racial kin. He cannot be free or feel worthy until his entire race is liberated and universally recognized as worthy.

The history of such a doubly conscious "Negro," as Du Bois continues the passage quoted above, is the history of a strife "to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self." In so doing, "he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost." In particular, he would not whitewash his "Negro soul . . . for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world" (2018: 7). Fischer's novella is somewhat amenable to this reading. She suggests a way out for William that begins with an insight about the relation between love and knowledge: true love, which is not to be confused with mere desire, is "all-seeing"; it "permeates the innermost being" and "spreads its wings with supernatural power where mere knowledge causes them to sink." This love for Molly and, with it, the profound desire to make her happy, "opened [William's] eyes" to the realization that Molly would not be happy with him (Fischer 1990: 361). And his finally clarified insight is that he should leave and join his still unfree racial kin in America. This will not give him a happy life, as he later writes to Sir Robert, but "at least . . . a dignified one"—as a reputed "savior" in the struggle for the liberation of his people, the so-called "great task." Far away from Molly's music, he will nevertheless enjoy the "beautiful music" in this struggle, the "sound of dropping chains" (1990: 365).

The title of Fischer's novella becomes particularly significant at this juncture. Throughout the novella, the "Negro" identity determines the trajectory of William's life. No matter how much he wants to be recognized as worthy on account of his humanity, his still-developing self-consciousness has to go through the painful initial stage where he sees himself as a "Negro" revealed in the mirror of the white gaze. Kant, as I presented his remarks about abstraction in section 5.3, would have dismissed such a tendency to see oneself through the gaze of another as foolish and harmful, a sign of mental weakness in being unable to look away from something when one should. This tendency makes one useless to the society, Kant would claim, because one is thereby involuntarily distracted and cannot focus on truly important affairs.

Fischer shows a lot more compassion: she seems to anticipate the Du Boisian view that it is almost inevitable that a "Negro" like William would develop a double consciousness in the world in which he found himself. William is given the occasion to emerge from his crisis of consciousness with a newfound strength to embrace his identity and, more important, to fight for his people's freedom as a "Negro."

This response to the experience of Du Boisian double consciousness is also a Du Boisian one in spirit. Just as Du Bois would ask of the "Negroes" in America, so might William ask whether a "Negro" in England had a *racially self-aware* mission—"a distinct sphere of action and an opportunity for race development"—or should rather aim at "self-obliteration" (Du Bois 2014: 57). To get out of an "incessant self-questioning and the hesitation that arises from it" (2014: 57), the "Negro" must fully embrace his identity and the duty that comes with it. Although it is unclear whether someone like William would follow Du Bois in holding that the black race must conserve its unique "physical powers," "intellectual endowments," and "spiritual ideals," he would probably agree that his race must strive by "race solidarity" toward the prospect of a "broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development" (2014: 58). One cannot wishfully rush to such a future of universal "human brotherhood" by "deprecat[ing] and minimiz[ing] race distinctions" (2014: 51).

Read in this light, Fischer's novella gestures toward a vision of cosmopolitanism that is antithetical to Kant's. Given my analyses in Chapters 1 and 4, Kant's raciology coupled with his teleological view of human history leaves nonwhites with no *agential* roles to play in his picture of a cosmopolitan future. In Fischer's novella, by contrast, William "the Negro" becomes an active player in a hopeful, determined striving for a racially egalitarian cosmopolitan future. He "will achieve," William pronounces in his letter to Sir Robert and Molly from the battleground in America. At the same time, he *demands* "a vow that [Sir Robert] will charge all his progeny to fight the battle for the rights of [black] people." As he later delivers his son (by a black wife), also named William, to Sir Robert and Molly (now married with their own children), he says: "When the task is complete, we shall see each other again!" Such is how the novella ends. This ending intrigues. Why does Fischer have the younger William left in the care of the white couple? As Sir Robert and Molly's little girl Betty "let out a piercing scream and hid her face in her mother's lap" upon seeing the young William's "totally black, curly head" at

the door, one has every reason to suspect that sooner or later he would experience double consciousness much as his father did (1990: 365–67). Maybe this is precisely the point: William wants to leave his son in the care of Sir Robert and Molly partly to signal that the fight for racial liberation and equality will be long and hard and partly as a daily reminder of his demand that their white children, who are to grow up with a black boy—another warrior-to-be, as the name "William" conveys—must be part of the fight. They will see each other again only in a universally free and racially equal world.

Whether this interpretation captures Fischer's authorial intent is not my concern here. What I find most interesting is that her novella is ambiguous and open-ended enough to stretch the reader's moral and political imagination. Its timing matters, too: when *William der Neger* appeared in 1817, an entire decade had gone by since the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Act (1807); still, it would take another couple of decades for the British Parliament to pass the Slavery Abolition Act (1833, to be enacted in 1834), which furthermore did not mean that Britain ended its practical involvement in either slavery or the slave trade right away.[45] And it would take yet another few decades before the United States, after a devastating Civil War, abolished its slavery with the Thirteenth Amendment (1865), which likewise did not end racial inequalities in this country.[46] So the fight for racial freedom and equality—not just on paper but in reality—would indeed be long. In fact, it is still ongoing. What makes Fischer's novella interesting is that it helps to highlight the question about the role of racial (self-)identity in this fight. The novella would have been much less meaningful had Fischer portrayed her characters, including William, as blissfully oblivious to his "Negro" identity—that is, as colorblind—and concocted a happy-ever-after ending for him and Molly in England. Instead, Fischer's William "the Negro" had to grow, on his own terms, from being ashamed of his blackness, to wavering

[45] The full title of the Slavery Abolition Act is "Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Service of such Slaves." This act did not end slavery in all British colonies. It mainly affected the plantation colonies in the West Indies. Moreover, the driving concerns in this case were likely more economic (Britain's West Indian plantations were no longer competitive) and political (there was an increasing fear of slave revolts on those plantations) than humanitarian. In reality, Britain continued to be invested in or, at best, indifferent toward practices of slavery and the slave trade long after passing the two abolition acts (Afigbo 2006; Sherwood 2007).

[46] On the aftermath of the Thirteenth Amendment and the ensuing Reconstruction (1865–77), which consisted in failed attempts to redress the economic, political, and social inequalities resulted from slavery, see Foner 2019. Also see Alexander 2012, Baradaran 2017, and Rothstein 2017, studies of the myriad ways in which the United States government continued to discriminate against African Americans and the lasting legacies of such systemic, institutionalized discriminations.

between that sense of shame and the feeling of dignity as a human being, and finally to affirming his black identity and embracing the historical burden attached to it, while vaguely signaling the hope for a racially equal future.

## 5.6. Conclusion

In "The Conservation of Races" (first published in 1897), Du Bois gives a sociological and historical account of "race" and then asks: "What shall be its function in the future?" (2014: 55).[47] A parallel question can be asked with respect to Kant's race concepts. To see how, let me divide a provisional history of those concepts into three phrases (in the logical, not temporal, sense).

As I explained in Chapters 3 and 4, when Kant developed a theory of race in three published essays, he did so mainly from the standpoint of a natural philosopher. Building on the work already done by Linnaeus and Buffon among others, he sought to divide all humans—as natural products belonging in the animal kingdom—into various subspecies. This is the first phase of the provisional history I am outlining. The result is the thin biological concept of race that I mentioned in section 5.1, which serves for a systematic classification of humans qua natural products.

The second phase engenders what I called Kant's thick notion of race. On this notion, the same material conditions that occasioned different hereditary skin colors also occasioned certain collateral racial characteristics, such as different temperaments. As far as Kant is concerned, the thickened race concepts help to organize and make sense of the vast amount of data collected about the various human populations around the world—from the "savages" in the Americas to peoples of the yellow race who are said to be cultured in arts but not in sciences, due to their alleged inability for abstract thoughts.

The third phase is the formation of a racial ideology that is also racist, insofar as it systematically denigrates some people and excludes them from enjoying certain goods (such as recognitional respect) on account of their racialized characteristics.[48] This phase activates (white) people's *imagination*

[47] See Jeffers 2013 for a clarifying analysis of Du Bois's distinction between ways of thinking about race. The analysis helps to sharpen the relevant Du Boisian insights about the nature of racism and the role of "race" in the still ongoing struggles against racism.

[48] This statement suggests that I treat the development of a race theory as logically prior to racism. Some may object that I am putting the cart before the horse. After all, it has almost become cliché to say that racism invented "race," not the other way around. I borrow Kwame Anthony Appiah's distinction between *causal* priority and *logical* priority (1996: 82) as a response: what we can retrospectively

more than anything else—by presenting them, often at unexpected junctures in a discourse, with vivid depictions of nonwhites as lazy, slavish, merely intuitive, and so on. They may thereby become *habituated* to see the world through a racial lens spontaneously and unknowingly. By the end of the eighteenth century, this mental habituation could be easily fortified through a larger-scale exposure to images of the racialized others, especially the depictions of blacks as slaves.[49]

What about the function of "race" after this third phase? Of the many ways in which race concepts could be used, they were used by white Europeans to justify the white supremacist world order and the continued oppression and marginalization of blacks among other nonwhites. This is a predictable political effect. But race concepts can also function in myriad other ways in a racialized society. One example is what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls "racial identification," whereby "an individual intentionally shapes her projects—including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good—by reference to [race concepts]" (1996: 78). Appiah contrasts this process with "racial ascription." They are two sides of "racial identity," which can function independently of whether the originally invented race concepts, as concepts that purport to signify natural differences between groups of people, are in fact empty.[50]

> [Racial identity is] a label, R, associated with *ascriptions* by most people (where ascription involves descriptive criteria for applying the label); and *identifications* by those that fall under it (where identification implies a shaping role for the label in the intentional acts of the possessors, so that they sometimes act as an R), where there is a history of associating

call racist practices might well precede, as one of the many *causal* factors, the theorizing of race done by Kant and others; this is compatible with saying that, in terms of *logical* analysis, we need a concept of race to explain what counts as racism and not, say, mere tribalism.

[49] The Wikipedia commons has a curated inventory of eighteenth-century portraits with black slaves: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:18th-century_portrait_paintings_with_black_slaves (accessed October 24, 2021). It also has a collection of similar portraits from the seventeenth century: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:17th-century_portrait_paintings_with_black_slaves (accessed October 24, 2021). For a contextualized analysis of one of the eighteenth-century portraits, see Palmer 2014. For a systematic study of how racial imageries can dynamically interact with racist views in a predominantly white society without the presence of a significant nonwhite population, see Blakely 1993. This study focuses on the Dutch world, but it reveals a mechanism of racist ideological formation that is generally applicable.

[50] Appiah is "against races" but "for racial identities" (these are the titles of the two parts of Appiah 1996).

> possessors of the label with an inherited racial essence (even if some who use the label no longer believe in racial essences). (1996: 81–82)[51]

A key distinction between racial ascription and racial identification is how much agential control the person labeled as an R can have. While I cannot control what racial identity others ascribe to me, I can choose to identify with an R and organize my life around this identity. For those who have multiple racial lineages, they may even have "a sense of identity options" (1996: 80). At the same time, Appiah is weary that "there is a danger in making racial identities too central to our conceptions of ourselves" and that "if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities" (1996: 32). In other words, even as we use racial identities to resist racism, Appiah cautions against "let[ting] our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies" (1996: 104).[52]

We may use these terms to recap my analyses of the two novellas in this chapter. In William's case, his racial ascription by others and racial self-identification as a "Negro" aligned with each other. He just had to decide what to do with this identity. Living in a racist world, he felt the pressing need to make a decision once his racial identity became salient in his self-consciousness. What is seen cannot be unseen in such a world. His racial identity would be central to and profoundly shape his life whether he liked it or not. He was confronted with two paths: he could either get weighed down by the constant wavering about his self-worth or, alternatively, seek to lift his own spirit through a practice of active hope, whereby he would prioritize and embrace his identity as a "Negro" and fight to liberate his racial kin. In choosing the latter, William was moving beyond his *current* racial identity as the white man had constructed it (a natural slave) and *re-constructing* it through his political actions, as an agent of history demanding that his racial kin be freed and treated with dignity.

By contrast, the tragic story of the "Betrothal" speaks to the danger of making racial identities too central to our conceptions of both ourselves and others within the old hegemonic racial framework. The mulatta

[51] On the difficulties of determining a racial identity, see Mills 1998: 50–66.

[52] This account of racial identity represents Appiah's more appreciative albeit still somewhat reserved view of Du Bois's insights in "The Conservation of Races," in contrast to his more critical reading in "The Conservation of 'Race'" (1989). See Jeffers 2017 for a helpful analysis of Appiah's evolving thoughts about race and racial identity, which also affirms the main point I wish to drive home in this chapter: racial identities have real-life consequences and can be valuable for the still ongoing pursuit of a just society, regardless of whether there are races scientifically speaking.

Babekan, born to a black slave mother, was legally treated as black. The legal ascription made her a slave at birth in Saint-Domingue. As she chose to self-identify as black during the Haitian Revolution, which (as Kleist portrayed it) sought to revert the existing racial order with a vengeful and murderous hatred toward the entire white race, this self-identification shaped her moral judgments. Her world was straightforwardly black and white: blackness represented the formerly oppressed and whiteness, the inhumane oppressor; now that such a world was turned upside down, she as a black woman felt justified to participate in the killing of any white people who came to her door. In a way, Toni could not escape the trappings of such a world. If, to borrow Appiah's terms, she had "a sense of identity options" because of her mixed racial lineages, this sense of choice turned out to be tragically illusory. When she eventually declared herself "white," she was simply changing her racial alliance within a framework presented to her by Gustav the white man, who portrayed the white womanhood as a symbol of self-sacrificing virtue. Her misfortune comes down to the fact that, in her world, this seemingly free choice of self-identification was doomed to be *misaligned* with the racial identity that others—black or white—ascribed to her.

These are two possible scenarios, though fictionalized and dramatized, of how race concepts might function in a post-Kantian nineteenth-century world. The history of race concepts in such a world and our present world, to use the terms I introduced in section 5.2, is ultimately a history of how they have been *used as tools*—with adaptive functions and evolving guises in different contexts and times—for a multiracial society to organize itself and for individuals to orient themselves in such a society. It took two novelists living in the era immediately after Kant to sense the inescapability of racial identities. While readers today may find Kleist's and Fischer's depictions of blacks simplistic or even offensive, we still have to reckon with the basic problems of racial identity similar to the ones revealed in their works. Individuals living in a racialized world will have to grapple with the question of racial identity sooner or later. This is especially the case for individuals who do not have the privilege underlying Kant's admonition, quoted in section 5.3, that one should just be at ease with oneself and not get distracted by self-observation. Can you really be at ease if you are seen as nonwhite in a society where your race has been historically marginalized and denigrated, where even casual interactions with people often remind you of their unflattering assumptions about your race, and where you cannot just be yourself

in public spaces because others may very well project what you do onto all who look like you? In such a society, you know that the blissful moments of ease you occasionally enjoy are never guaranteed and that, especially during times of societal crises, you can easily become the target of racial harassment, xenophobic sentiments, and so on.[53] It would be cruel to ask such a person to just ignore their racialized experiences and act as though we live in a postracial society.

In sum, race thinking certainly comes with risks, even when it serves to empower a people who were once racialized against their will and oppressed or marginalized on that basis and who now embrace a racial identity through a voluntary process of identification. But it does not follow that we must abandon race thinking (this would be racial eliminativism).[54] As Linda Martín Alcoff has argued, racial identity (as a phenomenological experience) "permeates our being in the world, our being-with-others, and our consciousness of our self as a being-for-others" (2006: 194; see 179–204); the way forward, then, is not to unsee race or to be colorblind but to "learn to see better" (2006: 204). One way to see—and make—things better is to adopt what Paul Taylor calls an antiracist "critical racialism," which is contrasted with "classical racialism" (such as the kind we find in Kant's work). One thereby "accepts race-talk, while also, for example, refusing racial hierarchies, maintaining a healthy suspicion of 'racial knowledge,' or contesting race-based oppression" (2022: 44–45). This nuanced *color-conscious* approach, as Taylor promotes it, combines the realization that "the scientific repudiation

[53] I say this as an Asian—Chinese to be exact—who came to the United States as an adult. I experienced racial unease most viscerally during the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw an uptick in anti-Asian hate. It was more than unease: it was a "racial trauma" that inflicted many who are perceived as Asians (Abrams 2021). See Hong 2020, which more or less captures my experience of an immigrant's rude awakening to the persistent anti-Asian racism in the United States, and Lee 2015, which contains a comprehensive study of the long history of anti-Asian racism in the Americas. For a novel that brilliantly explores the double consciousness experienced by Asian Americans and ends with a liberatory self-understanding, see Yu 2020, which won the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction. I should also add that I came to *self*-identify as "Asian," a label that felt alien to me in the past, only during the pandemic. I did so to feel less alone and more *empowered* in the company of other "Asians." This process of racial identification gave me, as well as many who are like me, a sense of agency and a motivation to be part of the change.

[54] See Taylor 2022: 52–81 and 125–30 for a defense of (critical) race thinking against challenges posed by those who endorse racial eliminativism. See James and Burgos 2022 for an overview of the relevant scholarly debates. As I already said in Chapter 2, I do not wish to delve into such debates, because they involve too many complex philosophical issues that go beyond the scope of this book. I have nevertheless implicitly taken sides in this chapter. To use Charles Mills's language (1998), I hold the form of racial *objectivism* that is called "racial constructivism" (in direct contrast with "racial realism," which treats races as natural kinds). I thank Reza Mosayebi and Elvira Basevich for urging me to be explicit about what I take to be "race," given my objection to colorblindness.

of classical racialism didn't lead directly to the abandonment of its social and political uses" (as we saw in section 5.2) with a resolute participation in "ethical and political struggles against white supremacy" (2022: 66). For professional philosophers and for Kant (Kantian) scholars in particular, some of these struggles can hit close to home. Or so we shall see in Chapter 6.

# 6

# Race and the Claim to True Philosophy

## Kant and the Formation of an Exclusionary History of Philosophy

### 6.1. Introduction

Here is an educated guess: if you teach in a program with philosophy majors (at a university in the United States), the majors fulfill their history requirements by taking survey courses on some combination of three periods of philosophy—ancient, medieval, and modern. The first two periods are probably bundled together in one course, which begins with a brief account of the pre-Socratic Greeks and moves on to Plato, Aristotle, and so forth.

This narrative is explicit in the *Classics of Philosophy: Volume I: Ancient and Medieval*, published by Oxford University Press (Pojman 1997). The editor rationalizes this arrangement by asserting that the first true philosophers were "Greeks of the sixth century B.C. living on the Ionian coast," as they sought "systematic understanding of metaphysics, and using experiment and logical argument, rather than religion or intuition alone, to reach its conclusion." As for other great ancient civilizations such as Egypt, China, and India, they are said to have arts and advanced governments but no philosophy or science. If they did produce something that *resembled* philosophy, it was allegedly too tied up with religion to be *true* philosophy. For example, "Ancient Chinese thought, led by Confucius (551–475 B.C.) [*sic.*] had a deep ethical dimension. But no epistemology or formulated logic" (Pojman 1997: 3).[1] In short, a survey course on ancient (and medieval) *philosophy* has to begin with Greek—hence *Western*—philosophy because, well, only the Greeks started philosophizing in the proper sense of the term, in accordance with

[1] Confucius actually died in 479 BCE. This factual error aside, the editor's claim that "Ancient Chinese thought" was "led by Confucius" and had "no epistemology or formulated logic" is both question-begging (who is to say that philosophy presupposes epistemology or "formulated" logic, and who is to decide what counts as either of these?) and misinformed about the depth and breadth of ancient Chinese philosophy.

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reason as opposed to nonrational intuition or religious authority. We will see how much this echoes Kant's claim about the history of philosophy, which once represented only a fringe view on a controversial topic and which he defended partly on racial premises.

Fast-forward to a survey course on modern philosophy. For the sake of argument, I focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If you are like me, who received a doctoral degree in philosophy in 2012, as a student you were probably unaware that there were quite a few brilliant women philosophers during that period. It is also likely that you were presented with the well-worn narrative that featured a few canonical philosophers from two camps—rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz) versus empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume)—followed by a grand synthesis in Kant's critical philosophy.[2]

This structure is explicit in the third edition of *Bacon to Kant: An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, which organizes its content under three headings—"the rationalists," "the empiricists" (adding Bacon and Hobbes besides the three mentioned above), and "Enlightenment thinkers" (Rousseau and Kant). The editor adopts this structure even while acknowledging that the rationalism-empiricism framework "distorts the truth by giving prominence to certain features at the expense of others," including the "few but influential" women philosophers (Thomson 2012: 6). The situation is not much improved with the more recent (third) edition of *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Ariew and Watkins 2019). This text, unlike its previous editions, answers the growing call for a more diverse canon by including a handful of women philosophers plus Anton Wilhelm Amo (c.1703–59), a Western-educated Guinean philosopher. But the editors attach the few excerpts by these philosophers to the same seven hyper-canonical men (from Descartes to Kant) as "associated texts." This leaves the false impression—the editorial intention aside—that someone like Émilie du Châtelet (1706–49), for instance, is worth studying only as a footnote to Kant.

Some scholars have problematized this canonical narrative and made concerted efforts to explore radically new ways to reform the canon.[3] In

[2] On how this problematic narrative came to be, including Kant's (indirect) role in its formation, see Vanzo 2013 and 2016.

[3] Two recent anthologies (Marshall and Sreedhar 2019; Shapiro and Lascano 2021) challenge the old canonical narrative in groundbreaking ways. The first of these gives separate chapters to thirty-two philosophers (from Michel de Montaigne to Mary Wollstonecraft), letting each philosopher

doing so, however, they still operate within the larger, institutionalized framework that equates what is in fact only a history of *Western* philosophy with the history of *philosophy* itself.[4] Within this framework, a typical philosophy major may, to fulfill their history requirements, have to take courses in ancient philosophy, which basically amounts to ancient Greek philosophy with Plato and Aristotle dominating the scene, and in early modern philosophy, which again revolves around Western philosophical ideas. If a department offers courses in other philosophical traditions at all, these may be encouraged as electives but will unlikely count toward the history requirements.

It does not help that the American Philosophical Association's "Philosophy: A Brief Guide for Undergraduates," which was approved by its Board of Officers in 1981 and revised in 2017, gives an ostensibly Eurocentric description of "history of philosophy" as a major subfield of philosophy.[5]

> This field studies both major philosophers and entire periods in the development of philosophy such as the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, Nineteenth Century, and Twentieth Century periods. It seeks to understand great figures, their influence on others, and their importance for contemporary issues. The history of philosophy in a single nation is often separately studied, as in the case of American Philosophy. So are major movements within a nation, such as British Empiricism and German Idealism, as well as international movements with a substantial history, such as existentialism and phenomenology. The history of philosophy not only provides insight into

speak in their own voice and treating no one as more canonical or worthy of studying than any other. The second anthology includes works by forty-three philosophers and revolves around twenty-five topics. Some of these topics, such as "equality and difference" and "feminism," draw attention to certain philosophical problems—particularly racism and sexism—that the old canonical narrative simply could not accommodate.

[4] See the editors' introduction to Marshall and Sreedhar 2019 (vii–xxiii), which gives a compelling critique of how the survey course on the history of modern philosophy tends to be taught and points to a new, more genuinely inclusive path forward. The editors recognize that the very practice of *requiring* the undergraduate majors to take such a survey course but not, say, a course on Confucianism is something that calls for justification (*if* the current institutionalized design of our philosophy curriculum is justifiable in the first place). Also see Shapiro and Lascano 2021: x. In this case, the editors acknowledge that they focus on "the European philosophical tradition" only to be "in keeping with the standard curriculum in Early Modern Philosophy," while expressing some optimism about the "current efforts underway to globalize the history of philosophy." Still, I wonder why the editors of both anthologies use an unqualified reference to "modern philosophy" in their titles, given that the anthologies are admittedly limited to *Western* modern philosophy.

[5] By 'Eurocentric' in this chapter, I mean a general tendency, including in North American institutions, to prioritize or focus exclusively on Western philosophical traditions.

> the other subfields of philosophy; it also reveals many of the foundations of Western Civilization.[6]

This description is Eurocentric in two ways. First, by rigidly dividing the history of philosophy into those five periods, the authors are using the European periodization that may not be mapped onto any other history without seriously distorting it.[7] Second, all the examples mentioned are Western ones, including the explicit reference to "the foundations of Western Civilization" at the end. What messages are we sending to students with this account of the history of philosophy from a leading philosophical organization?[8]

Things did not have to turn out this way. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore how the Eurocentric approach to history of philosophy that is reflected in the standard curriculum can be partly traced to a fateful mixture of Kant's idea of a "philosophical history of philosophy" and his raciology. As Peter Park has shown on the basis of a thorough and meticulous study of the relevant historical texts, it was a matter of controversy in the eighteenth century as to whether philosophy originated in the "Orient" (Egypt or India) or in Greece. At the time, very few historians held the latter view. Yet this view, which originated with a racist underpinning (as we shall see), was the one that would shape the Eurocentric discipline of "history of philosophy" as we now practice it. Granted, it would be hard to disentangle Kant's contribution to this development from the contributions by other influential players, as there might well be a feedback loop between one and the other (Park 2013: 69–95).[9] It will nevertheless be instructive

[6] https://www.apaonline.org/general/custom.asp?page=undergraduates, accessed June 24, 2022.

[7] On European periodization and its "rigidifying power" in shaping our "habits of mind," especially in the context of modern universities, see Green 1992. One cannot simply take this already arbitrary European framework and use it to periodize, say, the Chinese history. It is in fact so hard to periodize the Chinese history that historians still cannot come to a consensus (see, for instance, Xiong 1994).

[8] I am aware that many philosophy programs in the United States, including my own at Georgetown University, and in parts of Europe have started to acknowledge the problem and make earnest efforts to reform the philosophy curriculum to make it more inclusive in every sense of the term. Hopefully, the criticisms and recommendations directed at institutional practices in this chapter will become obsolete before long. With this in mind, I take myself to be playing the role of a historical witness.

[9] On the many directions in which the historiography of philosophy developed in Germany between the publication of Johann Brucker's *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (1742–44) and the emergence of various explicitly Kantian texts, see Piaia and Santinello 2015: 474–963 (especially 696–963, which focus on the Kantian turn and how it came to fruition in the early nineteenth century). For other studies of how philosophy came to be presented as an originally Greek affair and thereby restricted to a Western lineage, see Braun 1973; Schneider 1990; Bernasconi 1997. On more recent attempts at identifying philosophy with the West and what it would take to undo this identification, see Davis 2017 (a direct engagement with Bernasconi 1997).

to consider the matter from Kant's standpoint and ask how he might have reached the conclusion that true philosophy must have started with the Greeks.[10]

Overall, it is fair to say that "the exclusion of non-European philosophy from the canon," as Bryan van Norden puts it, "was a *decision*." Van Norden describes the decision as one that was "based not on a reasoned argument, but rather on polemical considerations involving the pro-Kantian faction in European philosophy, as well as views about race that are both unscientific and morally heinous" (2017: 21). To (some of) us today,[11] who have the benefit of hindsight, the conclusion that Kant and some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Kantians reached about the history of philosophy may indeed seem self-serving (it treats the Kantian philosophy as the apex of history) and racist (it excludes nonwhites as incapable of agential participation in that history). From their own standpoint, however, they reached the conclusion not because it confirmed their factionist tendencies or racist beliefs but because it *seemed reasonable*. We already saw in Chapters 3 and 4 that Kant was so assured about his raciology largely because it seemed to be the most philosophically savvy account of purported human differences (qua natural effects), as the ongoing controversies about this phenomenon spurred him—forever a truth-seeker regarding matters of apparent significance to humanity—to figure out his own position. We can make a similar point about his approach to the history of philosophy: because it was a debated subject in the

[10] Kant has a parallel story to tell about the aesthetic history or history of "the taste of human beings." He outlines this history in the "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764), after arguing that the European man "alone"—in contrast to the "Orientals" in particular—can make his feelings and inclinations morally appropriate (GSE, 2: 254). This history began with the ancient Greeks (followed by the Romans), who "displayed clear marks of a genuine feeling for the beautiful as well as the sublime in poetry, sculpture, architecture, legislation, and even in morals." This feeling purportedly became "degenerated" during the medieval period. Then, in his own time, Kant saw a happy ascendence of the human genius as if by "palingenesis" or rebirth, whereby "the proper taste for the beautiful and noble blossom in the arts and sciences as well as with regard to the moral" (2: 255). Germany purportedly had a privileged claim to this revival of the Greek aesthetic ideal. That is, as Kant would later suggest to his students, Germany's destiny (*Bestimmung*) is tied to its Greek lineage (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 840–41). In this way, Kant was part of an intellectual movement that, according to Eliza Marian Butler, brought the "tyranny" of the Greek ideal over Germany during the second half of the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century (Butler 1958; first published in 1935). See Hoffmann 2016 on how the Kantian ideal of beauty, as fully articulated in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), fits into that movement and furthermore connects with his raciology.

[11] I add the qualifier 'some of' because I cannot speak for everyone. In fact, if one reads the foreword and first chapter of Van Norden's book (2017: xi–xxi, 1–37), one will get the sense that many will dispute my proposition here, at least privately and anonymously if not openly.

eighteenth-century Germany and because he was inclined—or even felt obliged—to take on controversies that he deemed important to humanity, he sought a *reasoned* conclusion in this case as well.

In what follows, I shall reconstruct Kant's reasoning by connecting it with a prominent eighteenth-century German debate about *how to philosophize* and, relatedly, how to approach past attempts at philosophy: should one take some sort of eclectic approach or build systems (section 6.2.1)? Kant's sophisticated response to this debate is partly reflected in his metaphorical contrast between a learned "Cyclops" (one-eyed giant) and someone who looks at the world with the systematizing "eye of true philosophy" (section 6.2.2).

This contrast manifests itself in two fundamentally different ways of telling a history of philosophy. Kant's characterization of the difference resonates with his important distinction between *historia* and *Geschichte* (explained in Chapter 4): one may present the history of philosophy either as a descriptive *historia* of all the major, empirically known attempts at philosophy in the course of human history; alternatively, one may present it as a philosophical *Geschichte* in accordance with an idea of reason, so that it includes only those philosophizing attempts that manifest a teleologically oriented history of reason's self-development. Kant urges the latter approach: if the point of studying the history of philosophy is using certain historical materials as an occasion to *learn how to philosophize* (as opposed to, say, merely memorizing who said what) and, furthermore, to do so with an eye on the final ends of human reason, then one should only study the few philosophizing attempts that serve this purpose (sections 6.3.1–6.3.2).

For a piece of historical material to qualify as a genuine attempt at *philosophizing*, Kant stipulates, its author must be someone who was actually capable of forming abstract concepts and principles—in order to set ends and think systematically—and who lived in a society where one could freely think for oneself and publicize one's thoughts in a community of truth seekers. As far as Kant is concerned, only the "Occidental" or Western-European whites could satisfy these conditions. As a result, the Kantian philosophical history of philosophy could only have begun with the ancient Greeks. And, in modern times, it could be developed further only by the Occidental whites. There is absolutely no agential role for nonwhites to play in this development (section 6.4).

I have two main goals in giving this reconstruction of the reasoning behind Kant's conclusion that philosophy could only have started with the Greeks.

First, I want to show the extent to which his very concepts of *philosophy* and *history*, which may seem innocent on their own, are implicated in his argument for a racially exclusionary account of the history of philosophy. Without that conceptual foundation, Kant's racial views would not have had the kind of impact they actually had on how we now teach and practice philosophy at the institutional level. Accordingly, to challenge this institutionalized practice, we will have to begin by reconsidering the same meta-philosophical questions that Kant engaged with. What counts as "philosophy"? What is the point of studying and teaching "history of philosophy"? We may well have to look for radically different answers to these questions than what Kant gave—not simply to replace the Kantian way of doing philosophy, but to broaden and diversify our methodologies and worldviews. How can we do this in a principled way?

My second goal is to convey the need to work for a future when academic philosophers, who may also be educators in a changing, diversifying, and ever more interconnected world, will study and teach histories of philosophy in a truly cosmopolitan manner.[12] To this end, it would be unhelpful and unproductive to portray Kant's racially exclusionary claim about the history of philosophy merely as an unsound conclusion of a motivated thinker who succumbed to his personal prejudices. This portrait makes it easy for us to *otherize* Kant—the racist version of him—while feeling unburdened ourselves (it is partly for this reason that I argued against the individualistic or atomistic approach to racism in Chapter 2). I will explain this crucial point in the concluding section 6.5. I will urge the recognition that all professional philosophers, regardless of areas of specialization, are obliged to reckon with the Kantian legacy of a Eurocentric approach to the history of philosophy. Undoing this legacy is a proverbial low-hanging fruit for the institutionally affiliated scholars-cum-educators who are serious about *doing* antiracist work, not just talking antiracist talk.[13]

[12] I use the plural 'histories' intentionally. I already alluded to the pitfalls of talking about *the* history of humanity in Chapter 4, when I argued that monogenism, especially Kant's version of it, is no compassionate alternative to polygenism. An analogous point can be made about philosophy. I presume that few today would, if asked, concur with Kant that there is such a thing as the history (*Geschichte*) of philosophy qua history of human reason's self-development (to be explained in section 6.3). Without this assumption, there is hardly any ground for trying to fold different philosophical endeavors around the world into a single history of philosophy.

[13] See Huseyinzadegan 2018 for a parallel approach from the feminist perspective.

## 6.2. Eclecticism, System Making, and Critique: Competing Ways of Philosophizing

### 6.2.1. Eclecticism versus Dogmatic Systematization: An Eighteenth-Century Debate

Eclecticism was an important topic in the eighteenth-century Germany. The term 'eclectic' came to assume multiple meanings, so that one can be an eclectic in one sense but not in another. One sense is reflected in its definition in Denis Diderot's (1713–84) *Encyclopédie*: an eclectic is a philosopher who "dares to think for himself, returns to the clearest general principles, examines them and debates them, admitting nothing without the testimony of experience or reason" (1975: 36). Kant was undoubtedly an eclectic in this sense, who sought to be a *Selbstdenker* "in the service of science and humanity, not members of some sect" (Kuehn 2001: 179).[14]

Kant's stance regarding the so-called philosophical eclecticism—eclecticism as a *method* of philosophizing—is less straightforward. An eclectic in this case sees historical knowledge of philosophy as essential to true philosophizing. Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) was the most prominent advocate of this kind of eclecticism. In his view, historical knowledge plays an indispensable role in one's pursuit of wisdom for two chief reasons. First, no single individual can claim to obtain the whole of wisdom. One's own opinions inevitably have imperfections and inadequacies, which may be compensated by the opinions of others. Second, to the extent that a historical survey of various opinions on a subject matter lays bare both what is true or good and what is false or bad, it serves to alert us of errors, evils, and false wisdom, so that we can hope to avoid repeating them. Eclectic philosophy is therefore not only "very useful for seeking the truth" but also "equitable and just" (Thomasius 1688: 43, translated in Bottin and Longo 2011: 321). It is directly opposed to dogmatic sectarianism. It prefers an imperfect aggregate of changing opinions over a self-contained sect of permanent dogmas, as the former at least has the promise of progressing *toward* true philosophy.[15]

[14] Much of what I am saying about the debate over eclecticism here was part of my previous book, *Kant and the Science of Logic* (Lu-Adler 2018b: 17–27). There is one crucial difference: when I wrote that book, it did not occur to me to reflect critically on the fact that Kant saw ancient Greece as the birthplace of a scientific logic and Aristotle as its founder. The history of logic that I reconstructed in that book—from what I thought was a unique Kantian perspective—inadvertently perpetuated Kant's claim that philosophy could only have started with the Greeks.

[15] Thomasius 1688: 45–46, translated in Bottin and Longo 2011: 318. For further discussions, see Kelley 2002: 153–60; Bottin and Longo 2011: 301–23.

Following Thomasius, other leading champions of the eclectic method took care to distinguish true from spurious eclecticism. Johann Brucker (1696–1770), for one, highlights this distinction in his *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (1742–44), which represents the zenith of the eighteenth-century German eclecticism. Brucker explains how Modern Eclectic Philosophy differs from the ancient Eclectic School of Alexandria. While the latter is "an irregular, cumbrous, and useless edifice" founded on "an abundance of heterogeneous materials collected from every other sect," a modern eclectic "renounc[es] every prejudice in favour of celebrated names or antient sects, makes reason his sole guide, and diligently investigates the nature and properties of the objects which come under his observation, that he may from these deduce clear principles, and arrive at certain knowledge" (1791[2]: 59, 510).[16] The contrast, as the founder of French eclecticism Victor Cousin (1792–1867) puts it, is one between "blind syncretism" and "enlightened eclecticism." Whereas the former manifests itself in abortive attempts to bring different systems together "by force," Cousin explains, a true eclectic approaches all schools of thought with "equity" and "benevolence" and borrows what is true while discarding what is false in each, using none other than reason and experience as the basis for judging about such matters (1870: 33).[17]

The Thomasian eclectic method was pitted against the systematic method represented by Christian Wolff (1679–1754). Each side, Kant was once told, could go to an extreme extent (Br, 11: 213). The more moderate thinkers sought a "new eclecticism" to reconcile "elements of Thomasian and Wolffian teachings, with the latter providing most of the foundation and formal structure" (Schneiders 2006: 41). One may even see Wolff as the one who virtually ushered in this brand of eclecticism. According to Reinhard Brandt, in a way "Wolff's systematic philosophy dissolves the eclectic method by adopting it" and supplementing it with the principles by which to select ideas from multiple sources so that they make up a coherent system (2006: 148–49). As Wolff himself puts it, having or not having such principles is what separates

[16] Volume 5 of Brucker's *Historia* is entirely dedicated to a comprehensive treatment of the history of eclectic philosophy. On German eclecticism and its impact on the philosophical practice in the eighteenth-century Germany, see Bottin and Longo 2011; Garrett 2014. On the evolvement from ancient to modern eclecticism, see Kelley 2002: 31–168.

[17] Brucker also distinguishes "syncretistic" and "eclectic" philosophy. For a helpful analysis of how Brucker employs these notions, connects them to the concept of a "system of philosophy," and then employs all three notions in his historiography of philosophy, see Catana 2008: 11–34.

a system builder from a mere compiler. The distinction is not whether one draws materials from others, but *how* one does it. A system builder selects and connects truths discovered by others in accordance with the rational concept of an "end," since a "system" is a collection of "truths that are connected with one another and by their first principles" (1740: 635, my translation). Such an approach could hardly assuage the Thomasian eclectics, however. As long as the antecedently chosen principles are themselves assumed without a critical examination, what the hybrid method offers is ultimately no better than dogmatic sectarianism.

To see how Kant would position himself in this debate, we may begin with his conception of "system." A system is "the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea." The requisite idea is "the rational concept of the form of a whole," through which its boundaries and the relations of its parts are "determined *a priori*." A system in this sense is an organic whole—"like an animal body"—that is "articulated (*articulatio*) and not heaped together (*coacervatio*)." Its unity is "*architectonic* unity" insofar as it "arises only in consequence of an idea (where reason provides the ends *a priori* and does not await them empirically)." This kind of unity is directly opposed to "*technical* unity," which arises "empirically, in accordance with aims occurring contingently." A proper "science," Kant adds, demands architectonic unity (A832–34/B860–62).

According to Brandt, this Kantian conception of system differs from the Wolffian one mentioned above, precisely due to the eclectic element in the latter conception (2006: 153). Kant might draw the line somewhere else, however, roughly as follows. The Wolffian system likewise gets its unity from a rational concept of its end, a concept that supplies the principles in accordance with which the relations among the parts—a multitude of truths—are determined in advance. The *procedure* for generating this kind of system is necessarily *dogmatic* in a special sense of the term, namely, from principles. Wolff's philosophy epitomizes this procedure. What is problematic from the Kantian standpoint is that Wolff built a system on principles without first establishing their legitimacy through a proper *critique*, for which reason he committed *dogmatism*.

This distinction between "dogmatic procedure" and "dogmatism" is essential to Kant's appraisal of the Wolffian systematic method. On the one hand, its dogmatic procedure must be observed if we are to have any proper "science" at all, "for science must always be dogmatic, i.e., it must prove its conclusions strictly *a priori* from secure principles." On the

other hand, it is necessary to reject the dogmatic use of such a procedure, namely "the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, *without an antecedent critique of its own capacity*" (Bxxxv). In these terms, Kant portrays Wolff as "the greatest among all dogmatic philosophers, who gave us the first example . . . of the way in which the secure course of a science is to be taken, through the regular ascertainment of the principles [among other measures]." To reject Wolff's teaching of the dogmatic procedure is then "to discard the constraints of *science* altogether, and to turn work into play, certainty into opinion and philosophy into philodoxy." Meanwhile, it is important to note that the dogmatic procedure is a necessary but not sufficient condition of a "well-grounded science," which also presupposes a *critique* of the grounding principles. Failing to provide such a critique, Wolff came short of achieving the goal of building truly grounded sciences: he "had the skills for moving a science . . . into this condition, if only it had occurred to him to prepare the field for it by a critique" (Bxxxvi–xxxvii, modified translation).

By this analysis, Kant and Wolff agree that the eclectic method cannot deliver proper systematic unity. To whatever extent it is correct to say that Kant "rejects the eclectic procedure for the discovery of truths and turns to the idea of the whole, which is reflected in the order and completeness of the system" (Brandt 2006: 153), the same can be said of Wolff. Thus, whatever eclectic element there may be in Wolff's philosophy, it cannot be the kind that affects its systematic unity. The rational concept of the whole is logically *prior* to the eclectic gathering of truths and determines their interconnection in a system. Meanwhile, the dogmatic procedure cannot by itself generate the rational idea that supposedly contains the end or principles of a system in reference to which the relations among its parts can be determined a priori. If one is to construct a system following the dogmatic procedure, one must *first* find out, *by some other procedure*, the principles on which the system depends for its strict unity. One must also be able to determine that those are *the* right principles for a true philosophical system. That is, in a Kantian manner of speaking, they must be objectively and universally valid. As far as Kant is concerned, only a critique of human reason, which reveals its essential and final ends, can accomplish such a task. To develop this point and pave the way for my analysis of Kant's *philosophical* history of philosophy in section 6.3, let me turn to his account of what it takes to see things with the "eye of true philosophy."

### 6.2.2. Kant on the "Eye of True Philosophy": Systematicity with a Worldly Orientation

Kant often invokes the imagery of Cyclops, the mythical one-eyed giant, to describe a way of knowing. The missing eye, he argues, is that of true philosophy. This contrast is multifaceted. In different contexts, Kant characterizes a cyclopic thinker as someone who possesses a great deal of historical knowledge but no *philosophical knowledge*, or philosophizes without a *critique*, or thinks in an egoistic way, without taking up the *universal standpoint of humanity*. The italicized phrases represent different aspects of the missing "eye of true philosophy" (Anth, 7: 227). They also point to three layers of systematicity, namely the systematic unity of a given science, a systematic interconnection among the sciences, and what I will call "systematicity with a worldly orientation," whereby all sciences are referred to the final (moral) ends of humanity.

We may begin by recalling Kant's distinction between historical and rational knowledge or cognition (I use 'knowledge' and 'cognition' interchangeably in this chapter). As I explained in Chapter 4, there are two versions of this distinction. Subjectively, I know something historically if I hold it to be true simply because someone has told me so; my knowledge is rational if I have drawn it "from principles of reason" myself. Objectively, knowledge is historical if it is possible only on the basis of experience—as in history and geography; it is rational if it is possible only as a "cognition *ex principiis*, which has been drawn from grounds *a priori*"—as in philosophy and mathematics (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 797, 830).[18]

It is important to gain historical knowledge in the objective sense, Kant argues, because it supplies materials for growing our rational knowledge.[19] This point was especially important in Chapter 4. For the purpose of the present chapter, we now turn to Kant's concern about a particular form of historical knowledge, *Vielwissen* or *pansophia* (knowing a lot about everything). This can be either *polyhistoria* or *polymathia*. A polyhistor possesses a vast amount of historical knowledge in the objective sense. A polymath, by contrast, has extensive rational knowledge by memorizing, for instance, entire systems of philosophy.[20] A polymath who has thus learned philosophy

[18] Also see A836–37/B864–65; Log, 9: 22, 25; V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 52–53, 99–100; V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 697, 704, 733.

[19] V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 49, 245; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 870; Log, 9: 77–78; PG, 9: 159.

[20] Log, 9: 45; V-Lo/Pölitz, 24: 519, 522; V-Lo/Busolt, 24: 619, 625; V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 713–14; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 818.

but not how to *philosophize* is a polyhistor in the subjective sense (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 797).

Kant describes polyhistory, either subjectively or objectively construed, as "*cyclopic* learnedness, which lacks one eye, the eye of philosophy" (Log, 9: 45). This cyclopic learnedness is not necessarily blameworthy. After all, Kant surmises, some people may have only enough talents for this kind of learnedness:

> polyhistorians who carry around in their heads, as material for the sciences, a load of books for one hundred camels—one must not speak disdainfully of them, since they perhaps did not possess the faculty of *the power of judgment* suitable for choosing among all this knowledge in order to make appropriate use [*zweckmäßigen Gebrauch*] of it. (Anth, 7: 184)

This remark, as we shall see in section 6.3.1, is not as innocent as it may seem. Hint: who used camels?[21] At any rate, Kant's main concern about *Vielwissen* is that it can give rise to an illusion of philosophical understanding and make one arrogant (Log, 9: 45). It must therefore be kept in check.

> Gigantic learnedness is cyclopic, one-eyed, when it consists merely in historical knowledge and the other eye—reason, philosophy—is missing. A genius sometimes indicates vast learnedness, but it must be regulated; . . . Historical knowledge makes one puffed up; philosophy humbles. (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1315, modified translation)

What makes philosophy humbling? Well, true philosophizing is supposed to be an extremely demanding exercise of the mind. One cannot just imitate others or haphazardly accumulate bits of knowledge. Rather, Kant suggests, one must meet at least two requirements.

The first requirement is implicit in Kant's account of objectively rational knowledge: one must identify, a priori, the grounds or principles in reference to which given cognitions can be brought into a unified system. In this respect, mere cyclopic learnedness is opposed to a way of thinking that attends to how things are *interconnected* (Anth, 7: 226–27). Cognitions never add

[21] Kant invokes the metaphor of a hundred camels again at Anth, 7: 226–27. His use of this metaphor becomes problematic when one considers it in connection with his denigrating remarks about the "Orientals." See Almond 2009: 29–52 on Kant's views regarding the Islamic Orient, particularly the Turks and Arabs.

up to an interconnected system through accumulation. An idea of the whole must precede the parts. Even *before* one proceeds to gather (objectively) historical knowledge of the world through travel, for instance, one must form a "conceptual whole" by which to learn about the world; otherwise, one will only have an "aggregation" of information, but never a "system" (PG, 9: 158; see Log, 9: 93).

Second, one must reflect on and keep in sight the *ends* to which one can align all of one's cognitions. A polyhistor may possess a gigantic amount of knowledge, but the *worth* of knowledge lies somewhere else. "The real magnitude [*Größe*] of knowledge," Kant says, "is based on the extensiveness of its application, not on the quantity [*Menge*] thereof" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1228, modified translation). This should humble the polyhistor who prides himself for the sheer quantity of his knowledge.

> Philosophy can tear down pride and place his true ends before his eyes. Learnedness without philosophy is cyclopic learnedness. Philosophy is the second eye and sees how to attune the collected cognitions of the one eye to an overarching end. (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 818, modified translation)

Provided "All cognitions stand in a certain natural connection with one another," here is one way to set an overarching end for oneself: "one makes one principal science his end . . . and considers all other cognitions only as means for achieving it." In so doing, one "brings a certain systematic character into his knowledge." One cannot decide on the principal science willy-nilly, however. The decision must reflect "a well ordered and purposive [*zweckmäßigen*] plan," whereby the sciences can be connected according to certain *ideas of reason* "in a whole of cognition that interests humanity" (Log, 9: 48–9). That is, the ends to which one must attune all of one's cognitions cannot be merely contingent or personal ends, but *necessary* and *universal* ones (A839/B867n.).

This reference to the necessary and universal ends of humanity is presumably what Kant has in mind when he claims that the missing "eye of true philosophy" is that by which "reason suitably [*zweckmäßig*] uses this mass of historical knowledge" (Anth, 7: 227). The true philosophy here is a "world concept" (*Weltbegriff*) of philosophy, as opposed to a merely scholastic concept (*Schulbegriff*). Philosophy in the latter sense is "a system of cognition that is sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge." Philosophy according to the world

concept, by contrast, is "the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason" (A838–39/B866–67).[22] The "true worth of our use of reason," Kant asserts, lies precisely in this practical, teleological orientation (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 799; see V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 697–98; Log, 9: 87). To this end, we must know "1. the sources of human knowledge, 2. the extent of the possible and profitable use of all knowledge, and finally 3. the limits of reason" (Log, 9: 25).

Thus, Kant also characterizes the missing philosophical eye as "critique" (R5081 [1776–78], 18: 82) or "critical philosophy" (V-Lo/Busolt, 24: 625). This reflects his view that pure reason in its dogmatic use—a use that aims at the systematic unity of a science (Bxxxv)—must "appear before the critical eye of a higher and judicial reason . . . with modesty" (A739/B767). The requisite critique promises "a scientific and fully illuminating self-knowledge" of human reason, to strike down a speculative reason's arrogant wish "to fly with its own wings." Such self-knowledge is the hallmark of "philosophy in a genuine sense." In that connection, "Mathematics, natural science, even the empirical knowledge of humankind, have a high value [*Werth*] as means, for the most part to contingent but yet ultimately to necessary and essential ends of humanity" (A849–50/B877–78). By contrast, the cyclopic scholar makes an "egoist of science" for lacking this self-knowledge of human reason and hence failing to see sciences from the universal standpoint of humanity. Without being able to take up this standpoint, he also has "no measure of the magnitude of [his] cognition" (R903 [1776–78], 15: 395).

In sum, according to Kant, to see the world with a true philosophical eye is to bring three layers of systematicity into one's knowledge. First, one may bring given cognitions into the system of a single science (for example, physics), by grounding them on a unifying principle or set of principles. Second, one may connect multiple sciences and bring them into a larger system, by making one of them the principal science to which the others are subordinated as means. Third, one may bring all sciences under the final, universal ends of humanity. This results in what I call "systematicity with a worldly orientation."

This final layer of systematicity, insofar as it presupposes a critical self-knowledge of human reason, characterizes the Kantian response to the debate outlined in section 6.2.1, separating it from the Wolffian approach to philosophy, which presumably incorporates only the first two layers of

[22] See V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 798–99; Log, 9: 23–25. For discussion, see Fugate 2019.

systematicity. The differentiation of the various layers of systematicity also suggests the following to Kant: according to a rational *Geschichte*—as opposed to a merely empirical *historia*—of philosophy, while true philosophizing had to begin in earnest with Aristotle and go through Wolff among other modern philosophers, its final stage of development must follow the prescriptions of the Kantian critical philosophy. We will see Kant arguing for this point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* among other works, whereby he lays part of the ground for a racially exclusionary account of the history of philosophy.

## 6.3. Beholding the History of Philosophy with a True Philosophical Eye

### 6.3.1. The Kantian Rational History of Philosophy

A proper history (*Geschichte*) of philosophy, Kant contends, is such that "nothing can be told therein of what has happened, without knowing beforehand what should have happened, and also what can happen." It is a history "not of the opinions which have chanced to arise here or there, but of reason developing [*entwickelnden*] itself from concepts." To construct a history of philosophy is then to bring it "into a system of reason, which requires the derivation of the happenings from a principle" (FM, 20: 342–43). Consequently, a narrative of what has happened in the history of philosophy is inevitably tied with a rational conception of what ought to have happened and where it is supposed to be heading.

When Kant explicates the so-called philosophizing history [*Geschichte*] of philosophy in "What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany?" (written in 1793; published in 1804), he taps into the distinction between historical and rational knowledge that I mentioned in section 6.2.2. Now he characterizes the distinction differently, though, so as to introduce the notion of philosophizing as a self-development of human reason. Historical knowledge, he says, presents things "as they are," whereas rational knowledge presents them "according to their necessity." Accordingly, there is a distinction between historical and rational presentations of the history of philosophy: the former simply "recounts how philosophizing has been done hitherto, and in what order," whereas the latter presents philosophizing as "a gradual development [*Entwickelung*] of human reason" necessitated by "a need [*Bedürfnis*] of reason (theoretical or practical)" (FM, 20: 340). In other

words, the rational *Geschichte* of philosophy is a history of how human reason is bound to develop itself out of the need both to understand the world (theoretically) and to become practically free in relation to it. In this way, it is grounded upon a teleological conception of human reason.[23]

This teleological conception of human reason is also recognizable in contexts where Kant depicts the history of human knowledge. In the final paragraph of "On the Philosophers' Medicine of the Body" (1786), for instance, he uses the metaphor of a conjectural history of humanity—from savagery, through small societies, to a perpetually peaceful federation (*Volkerbund*) of sovereign states—to capture the "specific course of development" to which sciences are subject (MCP, 15: 953). Similarly, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87), Kant presents the critique as what enables reason to progress from the "state of nature," where it can secure its claims only through war, to a "perpetual peace." The latter is the "state of law," wherein the critique rules "the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason . . . determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution" (A751–52/B779–80).[24]

The dialectical process of warring struggles is not to be skipped over as far as Kant is concerned. Even when there appear to be no actual controversies, he argues that one must think up some.

> The seed of the attacks, which lies in the nature of human reason, must be extirpated; but how can we extirpate it if we do not give it freedom, indeed even nourishment, to send out shoots, so that we can discover it and afterwards eradicate it with its root? Thus, think up for yourself the objections which have not yet occurred to any opponent. (A777–78/B805–6)

On this account, the nature of human reason is such that it needs external stimulations to awaken all its potentials and gradually perfect all its talents under rightful conditions. Above all, conflicts serve to "shock reason, by means of the resistance of an enemy, into raising some doubts about its pretensions and giving a hearing to the critique." Reason may thereby be

[23] See Guyer 2009 for a related analysis of Kant's teleological conception of philosophy as a regulative conception of the development of human reason that eventually unifies nature and freedom (morality).

[24] See Møller 2020 for a comprehensive analysis of Kant's use of legal metaphors in the *Critique* (such as the "court of justice").

awakened "from its sweet dogmatic dreams in order to undertake a more careful examination of its condition" (A757/B785). If complete self-perfection is the destiny of human reason, its realization presupposes something akin to "the unsociable sociability of human beings, i.e. their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society" (IaG, 8: 20). Just as "it is this resistance that awakens all the powers [*Kräfte*] of the human being" (8: 21), so are "the endless controversies of a merely dogmatic reason" what "finally make it necessary to seek peace in some sort of critique of this reason itself, and in a legislation grounded upon it" (A752/B780).

Thus, a Kantian rational history of philosophy seeks to show how human reason necessarily develops, in accordance with its own nature, from the state of nature to the state of law under the highest authority of a critical reason. This basically captures what Kant does in the final part of the *Critique*, "The Transcendental Doctrine of Method," which determines "the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason" (A708/B736). It begins with a chapter on the "discipline" of pure reason. This resonates with Kant's view of how human reason must go from a lawless state of nature or *savagery*, through society (marked by culture and civilization), to a perpetually peaceful federation in which all sciences can thrive—free and without fear of mutual interference—within their legally sanctioned boundaries. As Kant puts it elsewhere, the human being must be *disciplined* first, before he can be cultured, civilized, and finally moralized (Päd, 9: 449–50). A savage is one who is "undisciplined" (9: 444). Savagery comes down to lawless independence. If not eradicated early, it will become entrenched and hinder the "germs for greater perfection innate to human nature" from developing (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 694). Discipline must come first, then, through which "the human being is submitted to the laws of humanity" and thereby prevented from "deviating by means of his animal impulses from his destiny: humanity" (Päd, 9: 442). Kant describes the "discipline of pure reason" in similar terms: discipline is the "*compulsion* through which the constant propensity to stray from certain rules is limited and finally eradicated"; discipline is therefore merely "negative," to be followed by the positive work of "culture" (A709/B738).[25]

[25] As I have explained elsewhere (Lu-Adler 2022b), Kant's conceptions of savagery and discipline are entangled with his raciology, especially as it pertains to the Amerindians, his go-to example of real-life "savages."

As for the rest of the rational history of philosophy, Kant understands it as various "attempts to philosophize" (A838/B866). Such attempts are part of the "self-development of reason," analogous to the development of an organism. Just as the latter development presupposes certain original germs (*Keime*) within the organism (as we saw in Chapter 3), so is there an idea lying in reason like a *Keim* "all of whose parts still lie very involuted [*eingewickelt*]."[26] Although the historical agents who made those philosophizing attempts certainly did so by grounding their sciences on ideas (remember Christian Wolff), theirs seldom corresponded to the true idea of reason. This is why, Kant submits, past systems "must not be explained and determined in accordance with the description given by their founder, but rather in accordance with the idea, grounded in reason itself, of the natural unity of the parts that have been brought together" (A834/B862). It is only in reference to such an idea that, as Kant puts it in the "Real Progress," a "philosophical history of philosophy is possible . . . rationally, i.e., *a priori*." That is, it "does not borrow [facts of reason] from historical narrative, but draws them from the nature of human reason, as philosophical archaeology" (FM, 20: 341).

What archaeology studies are ruins. It is in these terms that Kant begins the final section of the *Critique*, "The History of Pure Reason." His stated goal here is to cast "a cursory glance from a merely transcendental point of view, namely that of the nature of pure reason, on the whole of its labors hitherto, which presents to my view edifices, to be sure, but only in ruins" (A852/B880; see V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 804). Kant has argued in the preceding session that metaphysics is "the culmination of all *culture* of human reason" (A850–51/B878–79), because

> it considers reason according to its elements and highest maxims, which must ground even the *possibility* of some sciences and the *use* of all of them. . . . [it] secures the general order and unity, indeed the well-being of the scientific community, and prevents its cheerful and fruitful efforts from straying from the chief end, that of the general happiness. (A851/B879)

Accordingly, Kant's ensuing overview of the history of philosophizing attempts focuses on the various ideas that "occasioned the chief revolutions" in metaphysics. He divides the ideas into three categories, namely with

[26] In Kant's vocabulary, involution is associated with preformation. On Kant's analogization of reason as an organism, see Mensch 2013: 92–109, 125–45.

regard to "the *object* of all of our rational cognitions" (sensual or intellectual), their *origin* (a posteriori or a priori), and *method*, understood as "a procedure in accordance with *principles*" (naturalistic or scientific, the latter being dogmatic, skeptical, or critical). The authors of those ideas are either ancient Greeks (Epicurus, Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle) or Kant's early modern predecessors (Locke, Leibniz, Wolff, and Hume). From the ruins of their philosophizing efforts, Kant takes himself to have charted out the only path—the "*critical* path"—"to bring human reason to full satisfaction in that which has always, but until now vainly, occupied its lust for knowledge" (A853–55/B881–83).

This narrative may sound comfortably familiar to anyone trained in the Western philosophical tradition. What about other philosophical traditions—Chinese, Indian, Persian, and so on? Where would Kant locate them? As it turns out, the history of philosophy that he outlines from a transcendental standpoint—a history purportedly grounded in the very nature of human reason—has no place for those other traditions. It is no accident that, in his final telling of the history of pure reason in the *Critique*, Kant limits himself to ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle and such modern Western philosophers as Locke and Leibniz. It is not simply because he wants to focus on the chief revolutions in metaphysics (even in that case, it would be preposterous to assume that there was no metaphysics in non-Western philosophical traditions). Rather, by his assessment, the yellow race and the "Orientals" in general, for all the cultural achievements they had in the past, are simply *incapable* of true philosophy (even less so are the other nonwhite races).[27]

In this regard, Kant's depiction of polyhistorians—people who know a lot but merely historically—as carrying around in their heads "a load of books for one hundred camels" (quoted in section 6.2.2) was already a tell-tale sign. These people, he speculated, "perhaps did not possess the faculty of *the power of judgment* suitable for choosing among all this knowledge in order to make appropriate use [*zweckmäßigen Gebrauch*] of it" (Anth, 7: 184). That is, while they may possess vast "material for the sciences" (7: 184) in the manner of historical knowledge, they lack the capacity to make any *science* out of it or

[27] Kant's fourfold racial classification intersects with his East-West (Orient-Occident) binary. While "all of Europe, the Turks, and the Kalmucks belong to the white race," he divides them into "the Oriental and Occidental kinds [*Schlages*]" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1188). Nonetheless, there is a shared logic of racialization in his claims about the inability of all nonwhites and all "Orientals" for cultural and moral progress: in both cases, he traces the supposed inability to certain *fixed inner hindrances* (as we shall see in section 6.4).

to use it *purposively*. To do so, they would have to be able to represent a *principle* a priori, as required by the systematic nature of sciences, and to set a necessary *end* (*Zweck*) that is universalizable and independent of personal needs. These conditions in turn presuppose an ability to form and communicate thoughts *in abstracto*, which Kant thinks is lacking in all nonwhites and all "Orientals."

I shall explicate these points in section 6.4. Before I do so, it will prove important to clarify the relation between Kant's transcendental history (*Geschichte*) and what may be called an "empirical history" (*historia*) of philosophy. His distinction between these two concepts of history will be at the very core of his response to the eighteenth-century debate about the origin of philosophy.

### 6.3.2. From Brucker's *Historia* to Kant's *Geschichte* of Philosophy

In Chapter 4, I mentioned Kant's distinction between "the Greek *historia* (narrative, description)" and the *Geschichte* proper ("the investigation of origin in nature"), as two fundamentally different approaches to natural history (GTP, 8: 162–63). What is distinctive about the latter is that a principle must be established in advance "to guide the investigator of nature even in *searching* and observing" (8: 161). The principle, moreover, is not drawn from experience but determined a priori, in accordance with the relevant interests and maxims of reason (I explained this influence of reason in Chapter 3). In the case of humans (as natural products), for instance, one needs "an idea of the way in which the greatest degree of manifoldness in the generation can be united by reason with the greatest unity of phyletic origin." The investigator must be guided by this idea "merely in order to *observe*, i.e., to pay attention to that which could indicate the phyletic origin" (8: 164).

Kant would make a similar distinction with respect to the history of philosophy: this history is either a descriptive-narrative *historia*, or a *Geschichte* told in accordance with an idea or principle of reason that has been established a priori. Brucker's *Historia Critica Philosophiae* represents the former. Its operative conception of the history of philosophy is that of "a history of doctrines, and of men." As a history of doctrines, it uncovers the origin and evolution of opinions and compares different systems of ideas. As a history of men, it attends to major incidents in the lives of better-known philosophers,

especially the ones that might have influenced their views, and "takes notice of their followers and their opponents, and describes the origin, progress, and decline of their respective sects." Accordingly, Brucker's *Historia* traces "the history of philosophy, and philosophers, from the earliest records to the present time," with as much "impartiality" as possible by observing certain practical "rules and precautions" (1791[1]: 26–28). The result is a chronologically ordered narrative of all known philosophical movements, divided into three major periods.[28] Brucker's account of the first two periods includes Jewish, Persian, Indian, and Ethiopian among other philosophical traditions. He also talks about the mutual influences of some of these traditions. As for the third period, Brucker characterizes it in terms of its major players' shared endeavor to "improve philosophy in the true eclectic method," which "consists in rejecting prejudices of every kind, subjecting the opinions of former philosophers to the strict scrutiny of reason, and admitting no conclusions but such as may be clearly deduced from principles founded in the nature of things, and discovered by experience." And Brucker's list of "eclectic philosophers" is expansive, ranging from Bacon, Locke, Leibniz, and Wolff, who sought to improve philosophy in general, to Copernicus, Boyle, and Newton, who improved natural philosophy in particular (1791[1]: ix–xxii).[29]

From Kant's perspective, Brucker has thereby given us only historical knowledge of the history of philosophy. One who possesses this quantitatively vast knowledge may remain a polyhistor who cannot behold it with a true philosophical eye. Even if there is unity to Brucker's *historia*, Kant would see it as one that arises only "technically, from the similarity of the manifold of the contingent use of cognition *in concreto* for all sorts of arbitrary external ends" (A833/B861). For example, the narrative of the third period of philosophy derives its unity from the so-called true eclectic method in which various thinkers' contingent and otherwise diverse aims purportedly converged. A Kantian *Geschichte* of philosophy, by contrast, demands architectonic unity. It, which is at bottom a history of human reason, articulates itself teleologically "like an animal body," in accordance with "a single supreme and inner end" of reason (A833/B861).

[28] The operative definition of 'philosophy' in this narrative is simply "that love of wisdom, which incites to the pursuit of important and useful science . . . to the benefit of individuals and of society" (Brucker 1791[1]: 25).

[29] For the complete index of all philosophers included in the *Historia*, see Brucker 1791[1]: 501–55.

From the standpoint of "the philosopher," to borrow Kant's language in the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (1784), what matters here is the aim of reason itself, not the rational aims of the individuals who made various philosophizing attempts in the past. In the case of a universal history of humanity, the philosopher "cannot at all presuppose any rational *aim of* [*human beings*]," but seeks only to "discover an *aim of nature*" in the course of human affairs. A "history [*Geschichte*] in accordance with a determinate plan of nature" may thereby become possible. To this end, one needs to find "a guideline [*Leitfaden*] for such a history," in reference to which alone does "a *Kepler*" or "a *Newton*" become relevant (IaG, 8: 18). A history so constructed would treat the Keplers and Newtons as the means by which "the highest aim of nature [can] be attained, namely the development of all the predispositions in humanity" (8: 22). In sum, it is a "universal world history [*Weltgeschichte*] according to a plan of nature that aims at the perfect civil union of the human species," namely "in accordance with an idea of how the course of the world would have to go if it were to conform to certain rational ends." We must regard such a history not only as possible, Kant submits, but also as "furthering" the aim of nature, in that the idea just mentioned "should still serve us as a guiding thread for exhibiting an otherwise planless *aggregate* of human actions, at least in the large, as a *system*" (8: 29). That being said, Kant does not intend the universal history to "displace the treatment of history [*historie*], that is written merely *empirically*." On the contrary, the "philosophical mind" still has to be "very well versed in history" (8: 30).[30] This point echoes Kant's view about the importance of having historical knowledge (in the objective sense), as I mentioned in section 6.2.2.

Similarly, a rational historian of philosophy may still have to consult an empirical *historia* like Brucker's to identify a Locke or a Leibniz. It is just that he would treat such philosophers not in accordance with their own ends. He might not even be interested in a faithful, textually grounded exegesis of their work. Rather, to the Kantian rational historian, those systems and their authors are only the means by which *reason* gradually develops itself in accordance with *its* ends. What such a historian wants to do, as Peter Park has noted, is virtually "to rewrite the history of philosophy so as to remake

[30] For a further explication of Kant's conception of philosophical history, see Cohen 2009: 109–42 (especially 110–22, on the relation between philosophical and empirical histories). On the relevant distinction between *historia* and *Geschichte*, see Klein 2018.

it into the unfolding of the Critical Philosophy" and to do so with an insistent appeal to "a definition and criteria for philosophy derived from Kant's system" (2013: 24). In Kant's own words, philosophy properly so called—as "the system of all philosophical cognition" (a system marked by architectonic unity)—serves as "the archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize." Philosophy in this sense is "a mere idea of a possible science, . . . which one seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath . . . is discovered" (A838/B866). As far as Kant is concerned, this footpath will turn out to be precisely "the *critical* path" he has charted out in the *Critique* (A855/B883; see MS, 6: 206–9).[31]

It is with this orientation toward the critical path that Kant deems it necessary "not only . . . to carry out an exhaustive examination of the vain elaborations of speculative reason in their entirety down to its primary sources, but also . . . to draw up an exhaustive dossier, as it were, of these proceedings and store it in the archives of human reason" (A703–4/B731–32). The goal is not to learn any such "system of philosophy, e.g., the Wolffian system," a learning that would be merely imitative, not generative (A836/B864). Rather, the philosopher-to-be is called to study the history of philosophy as the *Geschichte* of how reason develops itself in accordance with its ends. At the phenomenal level, such a history manifests itself in a series of philosophizing attempts freely made by certain thinkers according to their rational ends. This means that the exhaustive examination that the Kantian historian purports to carry out is inevitably limited to the few attempts that represent the imperfect stages reason must go through in order to reach maturity. Such attempts must involve agents with the ability to set *rational* ends and to reason philosophically from first principles. Given Kant's view on the (in)capacities of the various races (as I explained in Chapter 4), the implication is that only the white race—the "Occidental" whites to be more specific—can truly philosophize. Therefore, only members of this race can play agential roles in the Kantian *Geschichte*. This, as we shall see, is exactly the position that Kant argues for in response to the eighteenth-century debate about the origin of philosophy.

[31] On the ascendence of and critical reactions to this Kantian history of philosophy, see Park 2013: 11–29.

## 6.4. Kant on the Origin of "True Philosophy": Toward a Racially Exclusionary History of Philosophy

As I mentioned in section 6.1, it was debated in Kant's time whether philosophy originated in the "Orient" (Egypt or India) or in Greece. He was evidently attuned to that controversy. In much the same way as he approached any other controversy, he *reasoned*, in accordance with certain principles, to the conclusion that history of true philosophy must have originated with the Greeks. His starting point is a notion of philosophy that establishes the criteria for determining whether a people in a given historical period could philosophize.

Overall, Kant takes there to be four basic conditions for the origination of true philosophy. They can be roughly divided into internal and external conditions, although Kant will eventually boil both sets of conditions down to certain natural predispositions and (in)capacities of a people. The internal conditions include the cognitive skills for *systematization* and the ability to set objective, *universalizable ends* from the standpoint of humanity as such. The external conditions include *political conditions* that are fundamental to genuinely free thinking and the existence of a nonpictorial native *language*, which allows one to form and communicate abstract thoughts.

The first two conditions are implied in Kant's distinction between the scholastic concept and the world concept of philosophy that I mentioned in section 6.2.2. These two concepts need not be mutually exclusive. Kant's main point in distinguishing them is that one should not stop at the pursuit of philosophy according to the scholastic concept, but do it with a worldly orientation, namely an orientation toward the final ends of human reason. The two concepts together represent what philosophy, as Kant understands it, involves.

According to the scholastic concept, philosophy involves "a sufficient supply of cognitions of reason" *and* "a systematic connection of these cognitions . . . in the idea of a whole" (Log, 9: 24; see V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 799). Philosophy in this sense is a matter of "skill." Its cultivation requires "method" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 800). For method is precisely concerned with "the form of a system of cognitions" (24: 795). It gives "directions for the way in which a system of cognitions is to be attained" (V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 700). Meanwhile, the need to focus on the form of systematicity presupposes the ability to think in abstraction from the content of given cognitions. This is presumably also why philosophy is supposed to be the science that gives systematic unity

to all other sciences: this unique advantage comes from the fact that philosophy "expounds cognitions *in abstracto*" (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 24; see V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 698; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 795, 798; Log, 9: 27).

According to the world concept, to philosophize one must be able to identify "the highest maxim for the use of our reason," namely a maxim that can serve as "the inner principle of choice among various ends." To be universalizable, such a maxim must be what represents "the ultimate end of human reason, to which, as the highest, all other ends are subordinated, and in which they must all unite to form a unity" (Log, 9: 24). Once again, this presupposes an ability to think *in abstracto*. Given the distinction between logical and real abstractions that I explicated in Chapter 1, the abstraction needed here is real abstraction. One does not arrive at the idea of the highest end of human reason simply by abstracting from differences among particular cognitions and singling out what they all have in common (this would be logical abstraction). Rather, one must abstract from the material conditions under which these cognitions are given and the contingent ends attached to them. The highest end must be cognized completely a priori, so as to be necessary and strictly universal.

At this point, we may return to Kant's notion of the "eye of true philosophy." In section 6.2.2, I used this notion to tease out three layers of systematicity in true philosophy as Kant construes it, which culminates in the world concept of philosophy, whereby all sciences are oriented toward and unified under the essential and final ends of humanity. True philosophy is thereby differentiated from cyclopic learnedness. Now, Kant also contrasts the learned Cyclops and the philosophical mind in terms of different mindsets or *Denkungsarten* (R904 [1776–78], 15: 396). To see the world with a philosophical eye is

(1) to *think for oneself* or to see "with one's own eyes" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1226), whereas a cyclopic learner merely *imitates* and therefore learns only *historically* (in the subjective sense of this term);
(2) to think from a *universal* standpoint, whereas the learned Cyclops is an *egoist* (R903 [1776–78], 15: 395); and
(3) to think thoroughly or consistently (*Konsequent*) and do so in reference to the final ends of humanity, so that one's knowledge can have true *worth*, whereas the Cyclops seeks only to accumulate a large *quantity* of cognitions (as I explained in section 6.2.2).

These clauses roughly correspond to what Kant calls the three maxims or "unalterable commands" for "the class of thinkers" (Anth, 7: 228), whereby one cultivates a *Denkungsart* that is at once enlightened, broad-minded, and thorough (KU, 5: 294–95; Log, 9: 57).

In a way, clause (3) captures the two internal conditions for the origination of philosophy I introduced above, namely the cognitive skills for systematization and the ability to set universalizable ends from the standpoint of humanity in general. Now we may use (1) and (2) to tease out two external conditions, namely political freedom and the existence of a native nonpictorial language. Kant's argument for the first of these conditions goes as follows. To philosophize is to use one's reason in a "free" as opposed to "merely imitative and, so to speak, mechanical" way (Log, 9: 22). That is, the philosopher-to-be is "one who thinks for himself" (9: 26). As far as Kant is concerned, this free use of one's reason is possible only under certain political conditions. "Before *philosophia* had utterly and completely separated itself from the power of the government and from the authority of the clergy in a nation," he claims, "no philosophy could really be produced." For this reason, he surmises, if the ancient "Egyptians and Persians" were indeed the first to investigate the origin of things, for instance, "this first inquiry will of course have contained more superstition than philosophy," conducted by "priests," not real philosophers (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 32).

Furthermore, to think for oneself is not to think alone, all by oneself. "To think *for oneself*" and "to think oneself (in communication with human beings) into the place of every *other person*" are intimately connected (Anth, 7: 228)—so much so that whatever "wrenches away people's freedom publicly to *communicate* their thoughts also takes from them the freedom to *think*" (WDO, 8: 814). One must be able to communicate one's cognitions freely in a community with other truth seekers. This kind of communication, Kant submits, is "really a most outstanding logical test of our understanding by the understanding of others." It is "the one true means [human beings] still possess for ever uncovering, becoming aware of, and correcting the frequent deception of their own understanding and its false steps." Accordingly, the right to communicate one's thoughts openly—that is, to practice the public use of one's reason—must be protected, presumably by a nonsectarian political authority (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 150).[32]

[32] Also see V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 92–93; V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 721, 740; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 874–75; A752–54/B780–82; MS, 6: 237–38; Anth, 7: 128–29, 219; WA, 8: 37–38; TP, 8: 304. For discussion, see O'Neill 1986.

From this perspective, philosophy as way of thinking that is generative and not merely imitative can only originate in a society where there is a secular governing body that allows and protects a public sphere where truth seekers can freely exchange ideas without fear of censor or retribution. "The freedom to think in silence is given by the people who tyrannize so despotically," Kant contends, "only because they cannot prevent anyone from doing it" (V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 874–75). There can be no genuine freedom of thought, however, without also the freedom to communicate one's thoughts and subject these to the scrutiny of a broader free-thinking and truth-seeking public. Therefore, one can say that "freedom in thought originates from a free form of government," namely, a republic (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 183).[33] In the ancient times, Kant finds this external condition satisfied only in Greece, where genuine arts and sciences thrived as a result; by contrast, "countries where monarchs and individual princes rule despotically . . . produce nothing but copies" (V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 183; see 24: 25, 173–74, 177–78).

Kant sometimes also suggests that what form of government a people have is not a mere accident, but ultimately traceable to that people's mentality. A putative *inclination* toward despotism is therefore indirectly tied to a people's alleged lack of sciences. Kant describes "the Oriental peoples," in particular, as incapable of forming "any concept of freedom for themselves," wherefore they "do not love freedom as much" and "imagine all forms of government to be monarchical" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1413).[34] Accordingly, if there appears to be an external impediment—such as the incessant control by a despotic monarchy—to the self-improvement of a nation, Kant still wants to drive the root cause of that nation's seeming stagnation inward, into the very mentality of its people. He makes this assertion about the "Orientals" in general:

> If a people in no way improves itself over centuries, then one may assume that there already exists in it a certain natural predisposition [*Naturanlage*], which it is not capable of exceeding [*übersteigen*]. The Hindus, the Persians,

[33] For Kant's comparison of forms of governance (republic versus despotism, for instance), see Anth, 7: 330–31; V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 847; V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1200–1201.

[34] In this passage, Kant is using the "Orientals" to illustrate the Russian people's supposed inclination to remain under despotism. Overall, he is of the view that the Russians (as well as the Poles) "have a greater Oriental character mixture than all other nations in Europe" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 661; see V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1185; V-Anth/Dohna, ms. 345–47). For one of Kant's earlier geographic accounts of all the European nations, see V-PG/Hesse, 26.2: 279–89 (especially 287–88, where both the Russians and the Poles are characterized as "slavish").

> the Chinese, the Turks, and in general all Oriental peoples belong to this group. (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1181; see V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 843)

We will see Kant making a similar move when we consider his account of the second external condition for the origination of true philosophy, namely the existence of a nonpictorial native language.

Kant, as I noted above, deems it exceedingly important that philosophers-to-be can freely communicate their thoughts for public scrutiny. "One does not understand a thing," he claims, "until one can communicate it to others" (V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 781). And, if philosophy is scholastic as a science (characterized by systematic unity), one mark of possessing scholastic cognition is that "one can communicate one's information [*Kentniß*] according to a certain system" (V-Anth/Busolt, 25: 1435). Such communications are possible for a people, Kant argues, only if they have a nonpictorial language, a language made of "words." Pictorial communications—by means of symbols (qua merely sensible or intuitive images)—may activate the power of imagination but can only confuse the intellectual faculty. Therefore, in the case of nations that have a merely "symbolic language" (as opposed to a discursive language made of words), they can hardly have any "correct concepts of the understanding" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 536).[35]

There is nothing intrinsically problematic with using one's power of imagination, of course. What Kant disparages is an "unruled" use of this power, whereby it cannot be brought into agreement with the faculty of the understanding. In the case of a people who exercises the power of imagination in this unruly way, he claims, "everything is based on a play of images, and as far as these images reach, so too their concepts reach, but where the images are missing, so too are their concepts" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1261). Who are allegedly so stuck in and limited by sensibility? All "the Oriental peoples," Kant concludes after a brief survey of the history of language, "still have a child's language of humanity"; by contrast, "the Westerners abandoned sensibility much sooner and have raised themselves up to the concepts of the understanding" (25: 1233). Thanks be to the Greeks for the latter, he adds, who "first freed themselves from the jumble of images" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 536; see 25: 656–57; V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1233).

[35] Also see V-Met-$L_1$/Pölitz, 28: 238; V-Met-$L_2$/Pölitz, 28: 535. The distinction between "words" and "symbols" and the treatment of the latter as merely sensible—hence merely *intuitive* as opposed to *discursive* (another groundbreaking Kantian distinction)—are key to understanding Kant's unique philosophy of language (Lu-Adler 2023).

If the ancient "Orientals" were allegedly only capable of sensible cognitions and could not think or communicate by means of abstract concepts, to Kant this implies that philosophy, which consists in cognitions from concepts and principles a priori, could not have originated with them.

> He who is only capable of representing something for himself according to shape and intuition, is completely incapable of what a concept requires; hence they are capable neither of a philosophy nor of mathematics, nor of being able to have insight into something through concepts. (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 655)

Setting aside the chicken-and-egg question about the relation between language and thoughts,[36] Kant suspects that the use of pictorial language by a people points to a deeper inner cause. "Who speaks by means of symbols," he claims, "indicates that he lacks understanding." He argues for this view with a simple modus tollens: "If they could represent something for themselves by means of concepts, then they would not need any images"; but the "Oriental peoples . . . represent all their concepts by means of images"; therefore, . . . (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 536; see V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1232–33).

Overall, then, Kant's ultimate reason for thinking that philosophy—or anything that can be properly called "science"—could only have originated with the Greeks is that they alone were able to think by means of concepts *in abstracto*. He has thereby given his definitive answer to the debated question regarding the origin of philosophy. The answer is summarized in what is known as "The Jäsche Logic" (published in 1800 under Kant's name with his authorization).[37] The summary follows a distinction between "philosophical cognition" as speculative cognition or cognition of the universal *in abstracto* and "common cognition" as cognition of the universal *in concreto*. From this distinction, Kant claims, "we can now pass judgment on the question, with which people we must date the beginning of philosophizing." The judgment consists in three propositions. First, the Greeks first began to philosophize in

[36] Questions about language—its nature, origin, relation to thoughts, and national differences—were hotly debated for much of the eighteenth century, particularly in Germany (Lifschitz 2012). Overall, Kant seems to agree with the mainstream view that language is constitutive of thoughts (Forster 2014). What is unique about his view is the particular type of language he takes to be the sine qua non of thinking in the strict sense, which is a "discursive" act of the human understanding (A131/B170): only a language made of *words*, as opposed to images, can serve this function. For discussion, see Lu-Adler 2023.

[37] On the place of the Jäsche Logic in Kant's philosophical corpus, see Lu-Adler 2018b: 9–17.

that "they first attempted to cultivate cognitions of reason, not with images as the guiding thread, but *in abstracto*." Second, while there were peoples, such as the Chinese and the Asiatic Indians, who indeed dealt with objects of reason like God, they did not investigate such objects "in accordance with concepts and rules *in abstracto*." Finally, "the Persians and the Arabs" admittedly made "some speculative use of reason," but they borrowed the rules for this use from Aristotle (Log, 9: 27; see V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 800–801).[38]

If the last of these propositions suggests a willingness to grant some "Orientals" at least the capacity for cognition *in abstracto*, though not any original idea of the relevant rules—namely, method—for this type of cognition, Kant is overall more inclined toward a sweeping allegation of the Eastern peoples' innate conceptual deficiencies. Nature, he speculates, has simply "failed them with regard to the faculty of judging from concepts." Accordingly, he disregards all their cultural achievements as unscientific and impure. He is not even willing to grant them architecture, insofar as in this case "a concept must lie at the basis, if it is to have taste and the complete approval of our soul." To him, while "Oriental" buildings are admittedly "rich in gold and precious stones," they did not originate "from any idea, any plan of the whole." Nor does Kant think that the Easterners are capable of true morality, insofar as this requires *pure* moral concepts and principles. If, for instance, both the Eastern and Western peoples cherish honor, the latter can do so from a "true concept" of honor, whereas "the Oriental people sought their honor . . . in authority, thus from sensibility and not from concepts." In short, "The Orient is the land of sensation, but the Occident of sound and pure reason" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 552; see GSE, 2: 252).

Such, Kant declares, is the "essential difference" between the two parts of the world that supposedly explains why the "Orientals" are not only incapable of sciences but also incapable of developing moral character.

> A capacity to act in accordance with concepts and principles is required for character. All Oriental nations are completely incapable of judgment in accordance with concepts. It is a big difference to judge a matter according to shape, appearance, and intuition, and to judge [it] according to concepts. All Oriental nations are not in the position to explain a single property of morality or of justice through concepts; . . . this difference seems to be

[38] On the role that the "Arabs" played, according to Kant, in transmitting the Aristotelian philosophy, see V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 36; V-Lo/Wiener, 24: 803–4; Log, 9: 31.

> very small; however it comes to the fore in the application. (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 655)

Kant is not just commenting on the past here. Rather, his claim about the Eastern peoples' inability for moral character points to the *future* of humanity. This message becomes evident if we consider his view that culture, civilization, and moralization are the stages of progress for which the human species, having left the state of nature, is destined. While acknowledging that "in moralization we have done almost nothing," Kant claims to "have reason to hope for it" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1197–98). This hope is rooted in his teleological conception of a universal world history, which represents "the human species . . . in the remote distance as finally working itself upward toward the condition in which all germs [*Keime*] nature has placed in it can be fully developed and its vocation here on earth can be fulfilled" (IaG, 8: 30; see Anth, 7: 324–30). And Kant grants the same *Keime* to all races on account of their shared human phylum (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 694). It should also be clear by now, however, that by his final analysis only the Occidental whites satisfy all the *conditions* to play agential roles in struggling toward and ever approximating humanity's final (moral) destiny on earth.

After all, moralization presupposes an actual capacity for grasping the pure concepts and principles of morality, a capacity that Kant has denied to the "Orientals" and, a fortiori, to the races of Amerindians and "Negroes." While he seems willing to grant the former a degree of culture, he sees no prospect for any further progress on their part. He surmises that, while there is "an analogue to science" in China and India, for instance, the people there has "come to the bounds of its destiny . . . since it lacks spirit [*Geist*]" (V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 840–41).[39] The Hindus, in particular, "acquire culture in the highest degree," but they can do this "only in the arts and not in the sciences" and "they never bring culture further" because they "never raise it up

[39] In his lecture on physical geography from 1770, Kant speculates that the *Geist* of the nations stems from the races (V-PG/Hesse, 26.2: 227). This is followed by an account of the peoples on each of the four continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, and America). The account begins with a detailed description of China (26.2: 227–36), where Kant claims that this nation has, instead of philosophy, a kind of morality (derived from Confucius's teachings), that its language merely signifies things (namely, it is pictorial), and that its mathematics is poor and betrays ignorance about even the easiest parts of Euclidean geometry (26.2: 232; see V-Lo/Blomberg, 24: 33). On Kant's increasingly dismissive view about the Chinese culture in general, see Hsia 2001.

to abstract concepts." In short, they "always remain as they are" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1187).[40]

These claims point to an over-the-top response to the debate about whether philosophy *originated* in the Eastern world or in Greece. The Kantian conclusion is not only that Easterners *were*, in the ancient times, incapable of philosophizing but also that they *are* so incapable now and forever.[41] The pedagogical implications of this conclusion are clear as far as Kant is concerned. He would sternly advise the following: do not study the "Oriental" stuff if you want to learn how to philosophize! The "Orientals" have nothing to offer, Kant would reason, for a student to use as the material to cultivate his philosophical skills. "He who wants to learn to philosophize," according to the rational historian, "may regard all systems of philosophy only as *history of the use of reason* and as objects for the exercise of his philosophical talent" (Log, 9: 26). This does not extend to the "Orientals," though, because they allegedly have no *system* to offer in the first place. What if, one may ask, the students want to dabble in the Eastern traditions just for fun? Kant would advise against this as well, seeing it as a threat to the Occidental way of thinking. One great "advantage of Occidental talent," he claims, is the ability "to judge determinately through concepts"; this advantage "must not be ruined by analogies and images," as one finds them in "the Orient [as] the land of sensation" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 552).

What is exhibited here, as Ian Almond puts it while commenting on Kant's manifest anxiety about the Islamic Orient, is "Kant's Occidental concern for the sanctity of the boundary—his desire for it to remain unbreached by the swarms of the Orient" (2009: 38). In this way, he was at the forefront of what Edward Said has identified as the modern form of "Orientalism" that started roughly in the late eighteenth century, which comes down to "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"—partly by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it" (1978: 3).[42] In Kant's case, the statements and descriptions he made and the

[40] Also see R1371 (1776–78), 15: 579; R1520 (1780–89), 15: 877; V-Anth/Pillau, 25: 842–43; V-Anth/Dohna, ms. 352–53.

[41] When the Kantian answer to the question about the origin of philosophy is summarized in the Jäsche Logic, the summary mentions the Chinese and Indians as examples of how "even today" some peoples still seek to understand things "only *through images in concreto*," not through concepts *in abstracto* (Log, 9: 27).

[42] Said mentions Kant (as well as Linnaeus and Buffon) as one of those eighteenth-century thinkers who were jointly responsible for one element that paved the way for modern Orientalism, namely the "impulse to classify nature and man into types" (1978: 119). Given what I am showing in this chapter, Kant's contribution to modern Orientalism might be much more than what Said calls a "penchant for dramatizing general features" (1978: 119). On Kant's Orientalism, see Battersby 2007: 68–84;

views he authorized about the Orient also exhibit an unrelenting determination to expunge what he took to be the "Oriental" way of thinking from the Occidental cultural landscape altogether.

This absolutist exclusionary tendency on Kant's part is not simply a matter of personal prejudice about the Orient. Rather, it is deeply entangled with some of his treasured philosophical ideas, including "spirit" and "genius" above all. Kant valorizes these as a sine qua non for the formation of a discursive language made of words (as opposed to an intuitive one made of pictorial symbols), which is alone suited for universal communications and even for true aesthetic taste and hence for the creation of beautiful art (KU, 5: 316–17).[43] Unsurprisingly, Kant treats genius and spirit as part of the "talent" according to which "the human being is formed," so much so that to ascribe—or, for that matter, to deny—talent to someone is at the same time to indicate his "natural vocation" (V-Anth/Mensch, 25: 1157). To the extent that, according to the Kantian system of racial profiles we encountered in Chapter 4, nature has not equipped all races with an equal share of talents and the white race alone contains "all . . . talents in itself" (25: 1187), it also behooves the latter race to preserve and further cultivate those talents (I discussed this point in Chapter 1).

It only makes sense, then, Kant would be adamant about disabusing his Occidental audiences of any thought that the Oriental ways might be worth emulating. As far as he is concerned, if "the oriental peoples . . . all speak with pictures," for instance, this only "indicates a weak cultivation of their spirit [*Geist*]" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1232–33; see R1372 [1776–78], 15: 598; V-PG/Hesse, 26.2: 227–36) and a lack of "genius" (R765 [1772–75], 15: 333). So to appreciate or want to emulate their way of thinking or their manner

Almond 2009: 29–52. On the eighteenth-century Orientalism more generally, see Aravamudan 2011; Kaul 2019.

[43] In the "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764), Kant contends that those "in the Orient" (GSE, 2: 252) have only "false taste" but "no conception of the morally beautiful" (2: 254). He attributes to the Arabs, for instance, an "inflamed power of imagination [which] presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images." The Indians are said to have "a dominant taste for grotesqueries," whose religion consists of none other than unnatural "images of idols." The Chinese come across as the most extreme of all: their "verbose and studied compliments" are but "ridiculous grotesqueries" (2: 252). By contrast, the Occidental man alone is said to have the capacity to interweave his feelings and inclinations "with so much that is moral" and thereby make them "proper" (2: 254).

of communication would "greatly wrong the understanding" (V-Anth/Fried, 25: 536) and result in a "degeneration of Occidental taste" (25: 552).[44]

In the end, and this takes us back to the Kantian *Geschichte* of philosophy, Kant is fiercely defensive of what he thinks is the only valid way of arriving at philosophical insights—valid in that it alone is aligned with the idea of human reason's self-development. As he later puts it in "On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy" (1796), the true philosophers-to-be are "obliged to proceed slowly and circumspectly from the critique of their cognitive powers to dogmatic knowledge," that is, to proceed "by the Herculean labor of self-knowledge from below upwards." For philosophy is one of those "sciences that require work, . . . so far as it is obliged to confine itself to a methodical development and systematic arranging of concepts" (VT, 8: 390).

Evidently, some of Kant's fellow Germans disagreed with this rationalist approach to philosophy—so much so that he found it necessary to publish an essay to "censure" the dissenting claims in the name of "the police in the kingdom of the sciences" (VT, 8: 403–4). He is specifically targeting "the latest German wisdom, *to philosophize through feeling*" (8: 401) and pushing back against the complaint that "scientific theory is unfruitful and ineffective" in making us better humans (8: 402). He entertains the possibility of not dwelling on this matter:

> why all this quarrelling between two parties, who at bottom have one and the same good intention, namely to make men wise and honest? It is much ado about nothing, disunion through misunderstanding, needing no reconciliation, but only explanation on either side, in order to conclude a treaty which makes concord henceforth more intimate than ever. (8: 405)

But Kant, as we can gather from his metaphor of warring struggles in the *Critique* (explained in section 6.3.1), would not let go of an opportune fight without settling it in the name of an authoritative reason. In the end, there can only be one way to philosophize *truly* and Kant is eager to enforce it. "The only *philosophical* method," he claims, is the didactic method of "bringing the moral law within us to clear concepts by logical instruction." As for the

[44] Kant finds it "ridiculous for us, who have a more masculine language, to exchange this for the child's language of the Oriental peoples and also to start speaking in sheer pictures" (V-Anth/Mron, 25: 1233). This claim about masculinity is a central feature of German Orientalism (Germana 2017).

*aesthetic* way of presentation, while one can "subsequently make use [of it], once the principles have been clarified by the first method, in order to vivify those ideas by sensory, albeit merely analogical presentation," it always risks "lapsing into visionary enthusiasm, which is the death of all philosophy" (8: 405). So it must be carefully and firmly policed. Thus, Kant righteously moves from protesting against the other side's "dismissive habit of crying down the *formal* in our knowledge (which is yet the preeminent business of philosophy) as a pedantry" (8: 404) to an intolerant position that delegitimizes any attempt to philosophize other than the one his critical philosophy has prescribed.

Although Kant's immediate target in the "Prominent Tone" is some form of Neo-Platonism, we can infer a devastating censure against all "Oriental" teachings in light of everything he has said about the latter. Having characterized their presentations as merely analogical and sensible, he would find it ruinous to true philosophy—presumably also to the Occidental *Geist*—to study them. So here is a natural conclusion: if reason were to develop itself further through the philosophizing attempts of those coming after Kant, they had better stay as far away from the "Oriental" stuff as possible! Well, we have the benefit of hindsight to surmise that Kant's followers got the memo.

## 6.5. Conclusion

I began this chapter with an account of the institutionalized practice of treating what is in truth only *a* history of *Western* philosophy as *the* history of *philosophy* itself (section 6.1). Building on Peter Park's important study of the debate about the origin of philosophy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I reconstructed the Kantian response to the question of whether philosophy began in the East (Egypt or India) or the West (Greece). Kant's conclusion that philosophy could only have started with the Greeks turned out to be a product of his idea of a rational history (*Geschichte*) of philosophy as the history of human reason's self-development (sections 6.3.1–6.3.2) and his view that only the Occidental whites satisfy all the necessary conditions—especially the ability to form and communicate abstract thoughts—to play agential roles in realizing such a history (section 6.4).

The resulting exclusion of all nonwhite and non-Western philosophical traditions is both absolute and methodic: Kant's restrictive notion of what it

means to philosophize or to see the world with the "eye of true philosophy" (section 6.2.2) dictates that, if the point of studying (teaching) the history of philosophy is to learn (teach) how to philosophize, then one should side with the Wolffian system builders in the debate over modern eclecticism (section 6.2.1). After all, philosophy proper is supposed to be what gives the greatest systematic unity to all sciences (section 6.4). Accordingly, anything recorded in an eclectic *historia* of philosophy that makes no such systematizing effort would have no place in a rational *Geschichte* of philosophy (section 6.3.2). Finally, the destiny of reason's self-development—to be realized through the philosophizing attempts made by a Leibniz here and a Wolff there—is to establish a cosmopolitan system of all systems, wherein all sciences peacefully coexist under the authority of a self-knowing reason. That is, the final stage of the history of philosophy must consist in system building under the supervision of Kant's critical philosophy (section 6.3.1). It is unsurprising, then, that the canonical narrative of the history of early modern philosophy ends with Kant.

By uncovering the racist logic of Kant's argument for the proposition that nonwhites and Easterners were not, and will never be, able to play any agential role in the history of true philosophy (section 6.4), I am not interested in leveling the charge of racism against him as an individual or, for that matter, against anyone who helped to perpetuate his racially exclusionary account of the history of philosophy. As I explained in Chapter 2, we should go beyond the individualistic or atomistic approach to the topic of Kant and racism. The reason is not just that we can never know what was in his heart (if this knowledge is required for determining whether someone is racist). Rather, calling *him* a racist lets *us* off the hook all too easily. As cognitive psychologists have shown, we are all susceptible to the twin biases of "fundamental attribution error" and "bias blind spot": with the first bias, we tend to overemphasize internalist explanations of what other people do—for example, in terms of their dispositions, character, motives, and so on—while downplaying situational factors;[45] with the second bias, we tend to see ourselves as less biased than others, presumably due to the epistemic asymmetry in how we assess ourselves (through introspection) versus others (by observing what they do).[46] When we find what strikes us as evidently racist claims in Kant's work,

[45] See Jouffre and Croizet 2016, which shows how the fundamental attribution error can be exacerbated in an unequal social structure.

[46] See West et al. 2012, which focuses on the humbling phenomenon that cognitive sophistication not only does not attenuate one's bias blind spot but may even worsen it.

it is easy for us to call *him* out for succumbing to racial prejudices. Finding no such prejudices in ourselves upon introspection, the natural next move is to *otherize* the racist part of Kant (or his work) from a safe distance—by looking away and wishing to have nothing to do with it.

This defensive posture betrays a misunderstanding of how racism works, however. As I argued in Chapter 2 by building on Sally Haslanger's conception of *racism as ideological formation*, we should see Kant as someone who played an instrumental role in shaping a racist ideology that systematically denigrates all who are not white Westerners and excludes them from such goods as candidacy or recognition for intellectual accomplishments. In this regard, we should keep in mind that Kant had a tremendous amount of positional *power*, both as a formidable philosopher and as a popular lecturer.[47] Accordingly, what matters is not so much what he personally believed as what he injected into the knowledge-producing and ideology-forming *ecosystem* through his publications and lectures, many of which were copied and circulated beyond his classroom. With his racially exclusionary account of the history of philosophy, the proverbial cat was out of the bag and bedevils us still, in the form of the curriculum situation I described in section 6.1.

Kant, with the arguments I reconstructed in this chapter, helped to undermine the inclusive and pluralist eclecticism represented by Brucker's *Historia*, which was popular and influential through the late eighteenth century, and to usher in a now institutionalized practice of treating the history of philosophy in a racially exclusionary and Western-Eurocentric way. The practitioners today may have no idea about the historical contingency or racist origin of their Western-Eurocentric conception of "history of philosophy." After more than two centuries, the racist elements in Kant's argument for this conception have long faded from our view. What is left is a form of *structural* racism, although most of us who help to perpetuate it may have no clue about our complicity.

Maybe this is just how an ideology operates: it is like the air we breathe, unawares. Unbeknownst to us, some of our institutional arrangements serve to further entrench what are essentially racist practices. They are racist not

[47] One particularly notable case in which Kant's power manifests itself is the impact of his condescending reviews of Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–85): thanks to "Kant's status as the dominant philosophical voice of the German and European late Enlightenment," his dismissive reviews "consigned Herder's work to oblivion for more than one century"; even recent critics interested in the *Ideen* apparently feel "compelled to justify the legitimacy and independence of Herder's contribution under the shadow of Kant's dismissive reviews" (Zhang 2017: 132).

in terms of individual practitioners' intentions or beliefs, but in terms of certain systematically exclusionary or discriminatory effects that cut (largely if not completely) along the racial lines. This is roughly the sense in which Jay Garfield, in the foreword to Van Norden's book on taking back philosophy, thinks that professional philosophy in the United States—and probably to a lesser extent in some other parts of the world—is "racist." "To omit all of the philosophy of Asia, Africa, India, and the Indigenous Americas from the curriculum and to ignore it in our research," Garfield contends, are racist institutional practices in that they "convey the impression—willingly or not—that no other culture was capable of philosophical thought." The question, then, is whether we can *reflectively* endorse such practices (Van Norden 2017: xx).

This takes me to my next point: for academic philosophers who aspire to *do* whatever antiracist work that is in their power to do,[48] a task is right under their nose. The prefix *anti* in 'antiracism' signifies active struggles, often against long institutionalized and deeply entrenched practices. There are plenty of such practices in our societies, the extent and depth of which we have yet to grasp fully and which we as individuals may rightly feel powerless to address. But there is a low-hanging fruit for institutionally affiliated philosophers: we can at least start honest conversations in our departments about the problematic nature of the curriculum we have inherited, which in turn determines the makeup of our faculty and probably even what students we can attract to our programs, and find concrete steps of reform to bring about a genuinely inclusive and cosmopolitan way of doing and teaching philosophy.

Without pretending to know how such conversations should go, I suggest that at the very least we need to reflect on and challenge what Robert Bernasconi calls "the non-porous conception of philosophy in which [we have] been indoctrinated by numerous histories of Western philosophy" (2017: 153). Why does philosophy, as the American Philosophical Association promotes it in its "Guide" to undergraduates, *have to be* "the systematic study of ideas and issues"—so that to talk about philosophy is to talk about what it "has traditionally pursued . . . systematically" and done so in a "reasoned" way in accordance with certain universalizable "techniques"

[48] Positional power is a matter of degree. Most philosophy instructors in higher education have the basic power to determine how they teach their classes and what materials they choose as sources of philosophical insights. We should exercise this power with caution because, if we are not careful, our syllabi can inadvertently perpetuate the Eurocentric worldview by forging it in the minds of students who trust that we know what we are doing.

(methods) and standards of "evidence"? The authors of the "Guide" thereby try to convince undergraduates that philosophy cultivates "sound reasoning, critical thinking, well-constructed prose, maturity of judgment, a strong sense of relevance, and an enlightened consciousness," capacities that are purportedly "never obsolete" but remain constant through "the fluctuating demands of the marketplace."[49]

This account of philosophy reflects what Van Norden thinks is a common mistake in the Anglophone philosophy, namely "the tendency to overemphasize argumentation," which often comes with the assumption that argumentation is something that can be reductively constructed in a rigid logical form (2017: 148). This skewed emphasis on argumentation, together with what Kristie Dotson calls professional philosophy's "pervasive culture of justification," in turn creates an environment that can barely sustain the work of diverse peoples—diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and so on—or diverse ways of doing philosophy, such as Eastern, experimental, and literal approaches (Dotson 2012).[50] Among other things, it serves to perpetuate what Minna Salami calls "Europatriarchal knowledge," a view of knowledge that is "rigid, rule-bound, robotic."[51] This view, Salami contends, is

> unable to deal with the real issues confronting humanity because it neglects the experienced side of reality. Our educational systems are stale; they teach how to transform the brain but not the psyche; they explain how to design evolved societies but not how to be evolved citizens of them; they claim that

[49] This description is from the same webpage that I cited in section 6.1 (note 6 above). To be fair, among the sundry descriptions of philosophy—because "no brief definition expresses the richness and variety of philosophy"—the authors also state that philosophy "develops the capacity to see the world from the perspective of other individuals and other cultures; . . . and it deepens one's sense of the meaning and variety of human experience." This is a promising start, although the way the authors proceed to describe the various major subfields of philosophy does not reflect a genuinely inclusive perspective.

[50] I should use this occasion to answer a likely reaction to my approach in Chapter 5, which revolved around two novellas. Just as Dotson was tackling the question "How is this paper philosophy?" so might someone wonder about my quasi-literary approach in Chapter 5: How is this chapter philosophy? My response would be to ask such a person to reflect, critically, on the assumption about "philosophy" behind the question. I thank Martin Sticker for pointing out the connection between my approach in Chapter 5 and my scrutinization of "philosophy" in the present chapter.

[51] Here we can also see what Sally Haslanger calls the dominant "schema for philosophy" that presents bona fide philosophy as "hyperrational, objective, and masculine" (2008b: 216). By Haslanger's analysis, this schema together with the associated race and gender schemas, which treat feminist philosophy, for instance, as emotional, politically motivated, and merely subjective, can explain the lack of gender and racial (among other forms of) diversity in professional philosophy. Haslanger offered this analysis more than a decade ago. How much progress has the profession made since then?

> emotions—central as they are to life—are incapable of explaining existence. (2020: 17)

Why is it not one of philosophical instruction's *primary* goals—especially in a deeply divided, distrustful, and unequal world like ours—to prioritize compassion and skills for harmonious coexistence, both with other humans and with all forms of life? This kind of teaching, as Salami notes, is abundant in nearly all non-Western philosophical traditions, most of which are grounded in some sort of *relational*, as opposed to individualistic, ontology. They represent a "philosophy of interbeing," not that of competition or domination (2020: 36).[52]

The point here is not that the mode of philosophical training touted by the American Philosophical Association should be replaced by an entirely opposite way of knowing. I am critiquing the fact that it conveys the lopsided worldview that, again to borrow Salami's characterization of Europatriarchal knowledge, "*all* worthy knowledge is rational and logical" (2020: 12). This was basically the view of knowledge behind Kant's exclusionary claim that only the intellectual attempts to systematize in accordance with the prescriptions of reason deserve the title "philosophy."

Returning to the question of what to do with the curriculum of "history of philosophy," there is no reason why we should not approach it as Brucker did, who characterized philosophy in the broadest term as that which essentially speaks to "the benefit of individuals and of society" (1791[1]: 25). After all, as Kant also noted, one should not study history of philosophy like a mere philodox, who can memorize what this or that philosopher said without understanding *why it matters*. Presumably, few today would take seriously Kant's teleological claim that the history of philosophy, considered from a rational standpoint, amounts to the history of human reason's self-development. What is the point of studying it, then? What warrants the existence of "history of philosophy" as a subfield of professional philosophy—or something that we *require* philosophy majors to take—if we cannot convince ourselves or our students that we can borrow from the myriad philosophical traditions insights and methodologies that may assist us in addressing

[52] To name just a few examples with real-world implications, there is the relational ontology in certain Indigenous American traditions of thought that promote a more sustainable approach to nature (Reddekop 2014), in the South-African concept of Ubuntu that contains an emancipatory alternative to the fundamentally exclusionary Western view of cosmopolitism (Graness 2018), and in the Chinese-Buddhist notion of Intra's Net that urges reflections on the ontological assumptions underlying the Western approach to education (Thayer-Bacon 2017).

issues that still concern us *today*? The us, moreover, should include diverse populations who, being situated in differing social locations, may have very different experiences of the world and therefore prioritize different issues.

In making this point, I am gesturing toward Dotson's vision of a "culture of praxis" that can make professional philosophy a more inclusive discipline. One component of this alternative disciplinary culture is the "value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living, where one maintains a healthy appreciation for the differing issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations." From this perspective, *every* philosophical project will be judged by its contribution to the relevant issues and no project can claim to be absolutely exceptional, mainstream, or perpetually canonical (2012: 17).

This is basically how Van Norden suggests we move forward with the discipline of "history of philosophy." We may begin by reconceptualizing philosophy as a "dialogue about important *un*solved problems" that still confront us (2017: 142).[53] This allows us to put philosophical traditions around the world and *across historical periods* in dialogue with one another,[54] evaluating them equitably in terms of their ability to help us better understand the problems at hand. For instance, one can put the Cartesians and Buddhists in dialogue about personal identity, Hobbes in dialogue with some Confucians about the relation between human nature and justified forms of government, and the Aristotelians in dialogue with some Confucians, Buddhists, and Neo-Confucians about the relation between moral understanding and moral actions (2017: 40–84). This problem-centered approach can be liberating while still methodic, avoiding crude eclecticism (it will be more like the "true eclecticism" that Brucker recommended). It is completely reasonable if one emerges from this multilateral engagement preferring one philosopher or philosophical tradition over another. What is utterly unacceptable is a dogmatic approach that "shuts down possible venues of dialogue *in advance*" and that, worse still, does so "by the exercise of institutional power" (2017: 150, emphasis added). Or, to borrow Dotson's language again, we can still make "judgments of good and bad philosophy" when we consider different

[53] I am not suggesting that Van Norden's alternative is the right way to conceptualize philosophy. After all, there are reasons, though not insurmountable ones, to be skeptical about the problem-centered notion of philosophy as well (Dotson 2012: 20–26).

[54] As I pointed out in section 6.1, the current periodization of "history of philosophy"—ancient, medieval, early modern (mainly seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and so on—is Eurocentric. This framework has to go, if we want to adopt a more liberating and multicultural approach.

philosophical traditions, but not gate-keeping "judgments concerning the philosophical nature of those endeavors" (2012: 18).

As a way of telling a history or histories of philosophy, the problem-centered approach also means that, if we highlight the perspective of a particular philosopher or philosophical tradition, we should contextualize it. Holding a genuine dialogue requires that we attend to the social and cultural conditions in which a thinker tackled a philosophical problem. As Bertrand Russell puts it in the preface to his *History of Western Philosophy*, philosophy has always been "an integral part of the life of the community." Telling a history of philosophy therefore requires "the insertion of certain chapters of purely social history." Most histories of philosophy, Russell laments, ignore the situatedness of philosophers. As a result, "each philosopher appears as in a vacuum; his opinions are set forth unrelated except, at most, to those of earlier philosophers" (2004: x–xi). By contrast, Russell's *History* is a history told partly in the spirit of Brucker's *Historia*—except that, regrettably, he also repeats the post-Kantian dogma that the Greeks "invented mathematics and science and philosophy" and alone "speculated freely about the nature of the world and the ends of life" (2004: 15).

The limitations of Russell's own *History* aside,[55] its emphasis on philosophizing being a socially situated and historically contingent act—when combined with the problem-centered, inclusive model outlined above—can be empowering as well as mind-opening to students today. We thereby humanize past philosophers. Instead of putting a select few of them on the pedestal and requiring that our students study them just because we have been trained to see them as exemplars of human thinking, we should show the students how to critically engage a whole range of philosophers and philosophical traditions as sources of insights on problems that are of (renewed) concern *now*. As Tsenay Serequeberhan states it so well while analyzing Kant's role in shaping the Eurocentric approach to philosophy, the critique of Eurocentrism in philosophy must be "grounded in the lived

[55] Russell, for all his intention to foreground the social context in which past thinkers philosophized, did not think of making slavery or colonialism a key part of the backdrop against which historical figures from Bacon to Kant philosophized (I highlighted this backdrop in Chapter 4). Nor did it occur to him even to *wonder* whether there might have been women philosophers, although he was a vocal supporter of women's suffrage (Russell 1910). In a way, probably against his best intentions, Russell's *History* ended up being a model of the Europatriarchal Knowledge that Salami criticized. And, while the qualifier 'Western' in the book's title may seem to leave open the prospect of telling histories of other philosophical traditions, Russell's claim that philosophy proper, which must include the element of "scientific" investigation, only began with the Greeks has virtually ruled out the possibility of telling, for instance, a history of Chinese *philosophy*.

needs of the present." It is a kind of "radical housecleaning" that needs to be done if our world is to become one of "mutual respect, recognition and *actual* human inter-cultural solidarity" (1996: 336).

How do we, as scholars-cum-educators, practice a genuinely intercultural approach given "the lived needs of the present"? For starters, we may explore ways in which the so-far marginalized or neglected non-Western philosophical traditions can lend us fresh perspectives on many of the problems that beset us now—the exponentially worsening environmental problems, the deepening inequalities everywhere in the world, the "loneliness epidemic" that has infected Western societies (Murphy 2020), the destabilizing fractures within Western democracies, and so on. We should tap into our students' realistic and sometimes urgent concerns about such problems and empower them to *philosophize* about these, much as past philosophers did in response to the concerns of their times. And we should expose them to a wide spectrum of conceptual resources, worldviews, and ways of thinking that can help them approach the problems at hand with depth, creativity, and hopefulness. In so doing, we may still read Kant and other philosophers from the old canon, but only if they have truly relevant and valuable contributions to make.

# A Forward-Looking Conclusion

## C.1. Kant as a Scholar and as an Educator: How I Have Interpreted His Relation to Racism

As I explained both in the General Introduction and in Chapter 2, the prevailing discourse on Kant and racism is individualistic or atomistic. This approach tends to prioritize individuals as the sole or primary subjects of the charge of "racism," of redemption (through a subsequent retraction of one's racist beliefs, for instance), of psychological analysis (regarding the possibility of holding those beliefs in the first place), and so on. Accordingly, the debates about Kant and racism are often about whether or for how long he was racist and what, if anything, we as morally aspiring individuals today can learn from the fact that even a great thinker like Kant could not escape the grip of racial prejudices. I sought to go beyond these inquiries (without disvaluing them). For my conceptual baseline, I adopted Sally Haslanger's notion of racism as ideological formation (Chapter 2). Applying this notion to Kant, I highlighted an overlooked factor in the debates about Kant and racism: his *social location* and the *power* that came with it.

Kant occupied two overlapping social locations from which he could, knowingly or not, make a significant contribution to the formation of modern racist ideology. As a rigorous, prolific, and eminent *scholar* who always had his finger on the pulse of his time, he was able to develop a groundbreaking scientific theory of race. As an *educator* with a decades-long teaching career, he was able not only to transmit denigrating depictions of the racialized others but also to imbue such depictions with normative significance in relevant contexts. In the rest of this section, I will summarize my findings in each of these respects. On that basis, I will then make some programmatic suggestions in section C.2 about how to move forward with Kant's philosophy (if one so wishes).

Let me begin with how Kant developed his raciology as a scholar and how it relates to other parts of his philosophical system. This interpretative task

roughly corresponds to Chapters 1, 3–4, and 6. In a way, these chapters spelled out a suggestion that Mark Larrimore once made about "the possibly constitutive place of race in Kant's philosophical system" (2008: 362). The place of race is "constitutive," according to Larrimore, in that we risk *misinterpreting* much of Kant's philosophy if we fail to take race into account (2008: 362). While Larrimore, like most scholars involved in the discourse on Kant and racism over the last couple of decades, is mainly concerned about whether or how his raciology affects his *practical* philosophy, I broadened the scope to consider how it intertwines with his *theoretical* philosophy as well. And I did so with an attention to the practical upshot of Kant's theorizing, even when the latter appears to be a purely speculative exercise.

With respect to Kant's practical philosophy, I rejected what I called the "contradiction thesis," the assumption that there is a straightforward logical contradiction between (a literal reading of) his moral universalism and racist particularism. According to this thesis, Kant's pure moral claims—especially the Categorical Imperative, as epitomized by the Formula of Humanity—is directly opposed to his racist ones. Two separate levels of discourse, which have distinct domains of reference, are thereby collapsed onto the same logical plane. I used Figure 1.1 to illustrate this point in Chapter 1.

To be more specific, Kant's pure moral philosophy considers the human being as a rational being as such (*überhaupt*) or *in abstracto*, in abstraction from his nature as an earthly species (to be studied in anthropology) and from the geographically varied conditions of his embodiment (to be studied in physical geography). Kant makes this "real abstraction" (as I called it) to ensure the strict universality, which he emphatically distinguishes from mere generality, of the highest moral principles. The resulting principles are therefore not referred to individual humans *in concreto* at all. So one would be misinterpreting Kant to reduce the universality of those principles to their generalizability over the domain of all actual, concretely embodied human beings. The contradiction thesis stems from this misinterpretation.

I then divided Kant's raciology into the *racialist* and *racist* parts, in order to locate each in his system. The former separates the human species into different races and assigns a distinct set of characteristics to each race. I designated Kant's physical geography as its primary locus. The racialism we find there need not be racist in itself. What makes a claim "racist," by my working definition (explained in Chapter 2), is that it *excludes* groups of individuals—on account of their racialized attributes—from accessing such goods as recognitional respect and equitable, agential participation in a collective

striving toward social progress. The racialist claims made about various populations in geography with respect to their physical form and other naturalized characteristics—such as temperaments and ways of thinking—get the *racist upshot* when combined with other parts of Kant's system. This becomes evident when Kant, having outlined a vision of human progress in pragmatic anthropology, uses his geographic knowledge to determine who of all peoples currently inhabiting the Earth can carry out that vision as actual agents of history.

Figure 1.1 again helps to illustrate this point. Kant is not just an abstract-minded moral philosopher. Abstraction is only part of his methodology. By the final analysis, he is a pragmatic thinker. In particular, he wants to determine the *conditions* under which the highly abstract moral vision articulated in his pure moral theory can be *realized over time* by humanity as a reproductive species, through a *historical progression* from nature, via culture and civilization, to moral freedom (moralization). To outline this plan, Kant must gradually descend—as a matter of logical order—down to the earthly conditions of human existence.[1] Figure 1.1 shows him as descending first to pragmatic anthropology, which studies the nature of humanity as a rational *species* under the genus "animal." He then turns to physical geography, which studies human beings as concretely embodied and geographically indexed entities. In the latter case, Kant is not talking about individuals as discrete beings. Rather, he treats them first as biologically related populations, reducible to four principal *races* in accordance with certain biomarkers. Then, having concluded that the white race alone embodies all the advantageous natural aptitudes, talents, and so on, he directs his attention to the various (Western) *nations* within this race. He thereby leads his audiences to the normative, racist upshot of his racialization of humans: only the (Western) white folks can and ought to play agential roles in propelling the human species toward its final (moral) destiny.

[1] By emphasizing that the order of descendance is a "logical" one, I am suggesting that the downward-pointing arrows in Figure 1.1 are not meant to reflect the temporal order in which Kant worked out the whole picture. If anything, the temporal order goes the other way: Kant started working on geography in the 1750s, which makes sense given his early interest in natural sciences, and taught it annually through the 1790s; his anthropology took shape as an offshoot of the geography course in the 1770s; and he did not work out his moral philosophy until the 1780s. One may take this order of development to suggest that, by the time Kant articulated his moral vision in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), he was already clear in his own mind about the normative relevance of his geographic account of human differences. To borrow his theory of abstraction (explained in Chapters 1 and 5), in the *Groundwork* he simply made a conscious decision to look away from what he already knew—only to bring the latter back into the bigger picture later on.

"Race" is also integral to Kant's theoretical philosophy, especially his philosophy of science. In Chapters 3 and 4, I explained how he theorized about naturalized human differences from the standpoint of a philosophical investigator of nature or *Naturforscher*. This standpoint befitted Kant's lifelong interest in natural philosophy. From early on in his career, he was intrigued by the phenomenon of organic (re)productions, particularly when these involved hereditary features. To find a path forward amid the ongoing debates in life sciences, Kant came to reflect on the methodological and other basic commitments of a *Naturforscher*, especially regarding the use of teleological principles in investigations about living beings. Some of the most sophisticated and quintessentially Kantian products of those reflections—for example, the regulative use of the ideas and maxims of reason in the study of nature—are found in such works as the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Chapter 3).

At the same time, the vast amount of data about extra-European populations concerning their skin color and other naturalized characteristics presented Kant with the "fact" of patterned variations within the human species, which his predecessors Linnaeus and Buffon had conceptualized and tried to explain as a law-governed *natural* phenomenon within the animal kingdom (Chapter 4). The variations within the human species, especially the ones involving hereditary features such as skin color, thereby became the *litmus test* for evaluating the competing hypotheses that had been proposed to explain variations within any given animal species. Unsurprisingly, then, Kant dedicated three scientific essays to the topic of "race," with an increasing awareness of the need to defend his evidently controversial theory on the grounds of a priori philosophical principles (regardless of whether empirical evidence was in his favor).

We risk misreading Kant's theory of race if we neglect to connect it with his broader scientific interests and methodological commitments (Chapter 3) or with the polemic context of his argumentation (Chapter 4). One example is his monogenism, which derives all human varieties and races from the same origin. Some scholars, as I noted in the General Introduction, have seized on this claim about the unity of species to extract antiracist implications from Kant's theory of race. This betrays a misunderstanding of the theory. As I explained in Chapters 3 and 4, Kant the natural philosopher defended his version of monogenism, which posited certain germs and natural predispositions in a single original human phylum, primarily because he thought it provided the best framework for explaining hereditary *differences*.

It also allowed him to *prove* that there must be exactly four principal races by deriving them from a single original phylum; otherwise, he would be hard pressed to *defend* his rigid racial classification as scientifically sound and objective, not just a merely arbitrary demarcation without any basis in nature. Thus, Kant's scientific monogenism carries no logical commitment to an equal treatment of all members of the human species—that is, no antiracist implications.

My analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 also revealed a connection between theoretical and practical philosophies that should not be overlooked. I drew attention to Kant's self-described Rousseauian turn in the mid-1760s, around the time when he became seriously interested in the phenomenon of organic (re)productions. He thereby aimed to orient all his theoretical pursuits toward human utility, so that he would value theoretical knowledge only in view of its contribution to humanity. A case in point is the 1765 advertisement for his physical geography course: this course was to provide a "compendium of the things which might prepare [the students] and serve them for the exercise of practical reason" (NEV, 2: 312). In the same spirit, Kant would see to it that his scientific theorizing about race was also practically relevant. In the process of articulating, defending, and refining that theory, he would register a model for understanding the conditions under which the human species—through an indefinite series of biological generations—is to *develop* its innate germs (*Keime*) and gradually approximate its final (moral) destiny on earth. Meanwhile, his racial geography provided him with a grid for mapping those conditions, informing his judgments about which peoples, on account of their naturalized and racialized characteristics, can (or cannot) be educated, governed, and civilized. This practical relevance of Kant's racial theory is particularly salient in his reflections on the historical places of Amerindians and "Negroes" respectively (Chapter 4).

We do not have to speculate about Kant's intentions in order to get the above picture. We only need to read him systematically and follow the leads of his stated methodologies, interests, and commitments, plus information about the relevant polemic context in which he argued for a position. I did the same in Chapter 6, where I reconstructed Kant's argument for the claim that true philosophy could only have originated with the Greeks. I brought together his conceptual claims about what counts as genuine "philosophy" and what characterizes a rational history or *Geschichte* (as opposed to empirical *historia*) of philosophy, on the one hand, and his claim that the Chinese, Asiatic Indians, and "Orientals" in general are incapable of forming abstract

thoughts, on the other. I connected these claims to the eighteenth-century debates over philosophical methods (eclecticism versus system building) and over the origin of philosophy (in India or Egypt versus in Greece). It was against this historical backdrop that Kant reasoned to his knowingly exclusionary view that true philosophy was and would remain to be a Western achievement.

What I also did in Chapter 6 was to connect Kant's narrative-bending intervention in the eighteenth-century controversy over the origin of philosophy with the Western-Eurocentric curriculum of "history of philosophy" that has dominated higher education to this day. I quoted the rationale given by the editor of an anthology of ancient and medieval philosophy for starting with the Greeks. The rationale resonated with Kant's argument: the ancient Easterners had no true philosophy because, if they wondered about big questions at all, they did so through "religion or intuition alone" without any "systematic understanding" or "logical argument" (Pojman 1997: 3). That editor probably knew nothing about the eighteenth-century controversy I mentioned or the fateful intervention by Kant and his followers. He might have simply absorbed an ideology that was a historically contingent aftermath of the Kantian worldview, according to which the Occidental white man is singularly equipped to philosophize. This ideology has shaped how generations of scholars have studied and taught "history of philosophy," even though its racist underpinning has faded from view.

This example illustrates what I said about Kant's relation to racism in Chapter 2. The most important aspect of this relation, I argued, is that he was well positioned in an extended nexus of social actors and meaning makers to play a significant role in the formation of a racist ideology. What put him in such a position were both his perceived intellectual authority as an ingenious philosopher *and* his role as a longtime educator. This is partly reflected in the fact that the materials I used to reconstruct Kant's argument for the Greek origin of philosophy included both his signature publications such as the *Critique of Pure Reason* and numerous versions of his lectures.

This point about Kant's role in facilitating the formation of a racist ideology has implications for how we should respond to the challenges posed by his views on race. The most meaningful question is not whether Kant himself made culpable mistakes while developing his raciology, such as a failure to scrutinize his data and an insufficient effort to neutralize the impact of personal biases on his philosophical work. I am not suggesting that it is entirely pointless to question Kant in those terms. It is just that this kind of

questioning can distract us from confronting the far-reaching *legacies* of his raciology. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, race concepts, once invented and *taken up* by socially situated meaning makers, can profoundly and irrevocably transform how people perceive and judge one another (including themselves). Standards of truth eventually become irrelevant, as those concepts morph into malleable symbolic tools for anchoring social interactions and (re)creating social realities. People with greater *power* are on that account better positioned to propagate such symbols and shape their associative meanings. Kant distinctly exemplified this kind of position, being an educator who had a decades-long teaching career besides carrying a lot of clout as a prominent philosopher. Kant the lecturer would not only present sharply delineated racial profiles (Chapter 4) but also insert denigrating imageries of nonwhites in philosophically significant contexts (Chapters 1 and 5). Such practices, I argued, could have a subliminal, intractable, and yet deeply formative impact on his audiences (Chapters 2 and 5).

By now, it should be clear that at least those of us who research and/or teach Kant have a *burden* to understand and reckon with the legacies of his raciology. To the extent that one still hopes to use Kantian conceptual tools for antiracist purposes, one cannot do so in a colorblind way. Rather, one must ask which, if any, Kantian tools may be useful for such purposes *given current social and political conditions* (these may vary from society to society and time to time). In this regard, one may take a page from Kant himself. After all, as I pointed out, he was ultimately a pragmatic as well as visionary thinker. He was attuned to the pulse of his time and astutely observant of its political dynamics, all to be a step ahead it (for good or bad). In that spirit, he would not want anyone today to adopt his pure-philosophical ideas or principles without being fairly informed about the complicated and very real world *in the present*. I will now give an account of what this may entail, when it comes to addressing racial injustices.

## C.2. How We Move Forward with Kant's Philosophy: Some Programmatic Ideas

Every study of Kant's relation to racism eventually prompts this question: now what? In the General Introduction, I mentioned the disagreement between those who (allegedly) wanted to topple Kant's metaphoric statue and those who fought to leave it exactly where it had always been. Such a

disagreement builds on a false dichotomy, neglecting a more sensible middle ground. Metaphorically speaking, Kant should be brought down from the *pedestal* on which he has stood for so long and be displayed in a museum instead, where historical artifacts properly belong. The display should be contextualized, so as to allow the viewers to interpret what they saw in a historically informed way. One should not have to strain one's neck looking up at him. Nor should anyone feel so self-righteous as to look down upon him on account of his racial views. Rather, one should be able to look at him at the eye level. The point of visiting him is neither to worship nor to point a finger at him, but to understand him with the curiosity—not presumption—about whether he still has something worthwhile to offer.

What is there to learn from studying Kant's relation to racism? The answer to this question—or even the need to answer it—may vary from one reader to another, depending on their own identities, social locations, aspirations, and so on. I am here mainly addressing those of us whose academic work (including teaching) somewhat revolves around or builds on Kant's philosophy. For this group, I submit, answering the question I just raised is not optional but *obligatory*. To the extent that an integral part of Kant's legacy consists in his contribution to the formation of modern racist ideology, an ideology that continues to shape lives and societies long after him, we "Kant scholars" and "Kantians" *owe* it to the ongoing antiracist struggles to explore potentially useful Kantian tools to address it. We should not assume that Kant's philosophy will have something particularly useful to offer. It is just that we must look everywhere for it, with methodological care and a critical attention to lived realities as well as intellectual curiosity and honesty.[2] Along the way, we may have to critique, amend, creatively appropriate, or radically transform some of Kant's ideas and methodologies. In what follows, I will illustrate my point by looking into this question: what kind(s) of *knowledge* do we need in order to confront racism in its various guises today?[3] I will come at this question from two directions, in line with my reading of Kant both as a scholar and as an educator.

[2] On the methodological care that one must take while attempting to appropriate Kant's philosophy to address issues of race and sex/gender, see Huseyinzadegan and Pascoe 2021 and 2022.

[3] On the ever-evolving guises and varieties of racism, see Goldberg 1993 and Alcoff 2006 (especially 247–84, which calls out the black-white paradigm dominating racial discourse in the United States and gives voice to the experiences of Latinx, Asian American, and mixed-racial groups).

## C.2.1. Normative Reorientation and Standpoint Awareness: The Work of a Liberal Kantian Scholar

Let me begin this section by picking up where Mark Larrimore left off. Having suggested that race may have a constitutive place in Kant's philosophy, Larrimore proposed:

> We may not be able to uproot the ideology of race [Kant] helped legitimate without tracing its connections to practical reason and providing pragmatic as well as theoretical counter-knowledge. (2008: 361–62)

If the reference to "theoretical counter-knowledge" means that we need to counter the ideology of race with empirical evidence and theoretical proofs, this may be a nonstarter. As I explained in Chapter 5, the ideology of race has maintained its grip on a society not so much because the underlying theories are yet to be disproven as because it is in the interest of those in power to maintain it. And most white people are hardly incentivized, for the sake of a racially inclusive and just society, to let go of what Charles Mills calls their "illicit racial edge" (2017: 215). What knowledge can we use to bring them on board if we are not to be cynical—because cynicism gets us nowhere—or assume in advance that this is impossible?

Suppose we want to try moral suasion. Can we simply say that Kantianism as a normative theory—in spite of its original author's own racist views—already implies the imperative of racial inclusivity and so can be used directly, as a normative framework, to confront racism? Part of Mills's response to this kind of question is to distinguish "substantial" from "nominal" racial inclusion (2017: 209). In these terms, Kantian norms are at best nominally inclusive.[4] The real question is what it would take to bring about substantial racial inclusion, as specifically manifested in equitable distributions of education and employment opportunities, real estate loans, political power, clean and safe environment, and so on along the racial lines.

[4] I say that Kantian norms are "at best" nominally inclusive because it is unclear that they, as Kant himself would understand them, are inclusive even in the nominal sense. By my analysis in Chapter 1, the pure moral principles developed in the *Groundwork*, for instance, are strictly speaking about humans qua rational beings *in abstracto*. As such, those principles are colorblind and have nothing to do with humans qua racialized beings *in concreto*. So one cannot say that nominally or by way of logical entailment they are inclusive of all "races." Nevertheless, Kantians today may reinterpret them as inclusive in this nominal sense.

This point about the need to realize *substantial* racial inclusion is crucial. It can affect the relevance or fruitfulness of Kantian ideas and methodologies as we try to adapt them for antiracist purposes. In particular, we should not take the usefulness of Kant's pure practical principles for granted. As I noted in the General Introduction, those principles are nonexclusive only thanks to the method of real abstraction that Kant used to derive them. Such nonexclusivity does not entail *racial* inclusivity or carry the *antiracist* implication that some have attributed to it. The principles are color*blind*, so to speak, and indeed blind to the empirical conditions of human existence and to the historicity of social and political arrangements altogether. This highly abstract nature of the Kantian pure practical principles, as I also noted, was in fact what left room for Kant himself to conceive their possible instantiations in the real world as racially exclusive. His methodic and pragmatically minded procedure is nevertheless worth considering: he knew he must take into account the relevant historical conditions of his day in order to figure out how to *bridge* theory and practice.

Similarly, the liberal Kantian theorists today must factor in the relevant historical conditions, here and now, that can affect the realization of their liberal ideals.[5] This requires that the theorists register racial differences—not as a biological fact but as a constructed and yet impactful social reality—and *take into account*, for instance, "the radically different history and structural positioning of blacks in the polity" (Mills 2017: 209).[6] The task here is a fundamental *correction* of racial injustices as a historically rooted structural problem. This means that Kantian liberalism today must be *self-consciously* different from Kant's original liberalism in terms of what Mills calls their "normative priorities." Kant's priority, as I have interpreted him in this book, was to chart a path toward humanity's moral future *as a species* and to do so on the premise of a world order that was at least de facto dominated by a few Western European powers. It is therefore unsurprising that liberalism as Kant fleshed it out was virtually "*complicit with* rather than *condemnatory of*

[5] By "liberal ideals" in this context, I am mainly referring to commitments about justice and equal opportunities for all individuals in a given society. I am setting aside debated questions about "liberalism" itself (for an overview of such questions, see Courtland et al. 2022).

[6] In Chapter 5, I explained how to understand "race" and take it seriously without seeing it as a natural kind. For a thorough and clarifying study of the relation between biological and social concepts of race, their respective histories, and real-world consequences, see Graves and Goodman 2021. For a critically acclaimed, frequently updated work on "colorblind racism" in the United States, see Bonilla-Silva 2021. It is telling that this book is now in its sixth edition, each new edition having been driven by the need to capture yet another manifestation of structural racism at a new historical moment (this time the COVID-19 pandemic).

group subordination" (we saw this reflected in his approach to racial slavery in Chapter 4). By contrast, today's liberal Kantianism, if it sincerely aspires for a racially inclusive and equitable society, must make "corrective justice its central concern" (Mills 2017: 209).

This corrective project will inevitably run up against all sorts of obstacles. After all, to quote Mills again, in a society with an entrenched historical legacy of racism, what substantial racial inclusion entails "for individual person-to-person interactions and for our collective duty to transform the *Rassenstaat* into the *Rechtsstaat*" will necessarily be "very dramatic" (2017: 210). One cannot rest the hopes for such a substantial transformation "on moral suasion alone but on the mobilization of group interests" (2017: 206). It may even be counterproductive to moralize antiracism when what one needs most is a shrewd understanding of political realities and of effective ways to motivate people who have divergent group interests. As Mills clarifies his point, while fighting for racial justice on moral grounds is a noble thing to do, history has taught us that "the motivation for the white majority to join in the struggle for racial justice cannot be activated on purely moral grounds." Rather, most whites will do so only when it appears to converge with their own interests. No matter whether this reflects a "general truth about human beings or a more contingent truth about human beings socialized by racial privilege," it is truth regardless and should not be ignored (2017: 134).

With this analysis, we can circle back to the question about knowledge I raised at the beginning of this subsection. What kind of knowledge, I asked, do we need to confront racism? If, as Mills has suggested, correcting racial injustices should be a central concern of liberal Kantianism today, then the liberal theorist must at least *adequately describe nonideal social realities*.[7] The description must make salient, for instance, the structural features that (re)

[7] Mills talks about the nonideal in the context of critiquing "ideal theory," understood as a theory that relies on "idealization to the exclusion, or at least marginalization, of the actual" (2017: 75; see note 9 below). His treatment of ideal theory is controversial. Among other things, it is not always clear whether he is really rejecting ideal theory (idealization) per se or just inappropriate abstraction in political philosophy. This is where various criticisms come in. One problem is that Mills does not justify his conceptualization of "ideal theory" vis-à-vis the alternatives (Stemplowska 2008: 320–22; see Valentini 2012 on the different ways in which one can distinguish ideal and nonideal theories). This justification is called for, given that he makes the ideal/nonideal distinction so sharp and absolute that the ideal and the nonideal represent two mutually exclusive theories, whereas many theorists prefer an inclusive, flexible, and context-sensitive distinction (Sleat 2016: 28–29). Furthermore, if ideal theory necessarily involves "idealization" as Mills construed it, namely the making of (significantly) *false* assumptions, this is not always a bad thing (Stemplowska 2008: 326–38; Hancox-Li 2017: 333–41). In light of these controversies, my focus here is on inappropriate and counterproductive abstractions in modeling social and political realities. I am not taking sides in the debates about ideal versus nonideal theories.

produce racial injustices. Inspired by the use of models in science, Mills calls this kind of work "descriptive modeling."[8] Modeling the target phenomenon necessarily involves abstraction, and *how* one does this can fundamentally affect the application of a (normative) theory. Mills calls out the deficient abstractions used in mainstream liberalism, which idealizes everything from social ontology to humans as cognitive agents.[9] The resulting model rendered invisible the "realities that are crucial to our comprehension of the actual workings of injustice in human interactions and social institutions." These include, inter alia, the "relations of structural domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression" as well as the various "hegemonic ideologies and group-specific experience" that can profoundly shape how we perceive the social order and our places in it (2017: 73–77).

In the case of race, abstracting away from racialized social realities has resulted in what David Theo Goldberg calls a "liberal paradox": "Race is irrelevant, but all is race. . . . The more . . . open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes." What makes this kind of approach paradoxical is that it tries to overcome racial differences by *assuming them away* and by imposing its colorblind presumption of sameness (1993: 6–7). As Linda Martín Alcoff further spells out the paradox, modern liberal philosophers would have us deny the "legitimacy and moral relevance of racial concepts" even while race continues to determine a great deal of social reality, such as "job prospects, career possibilities, available places to live, potential friends and lovers, reactions from police, credence from jurors, and the amount of credibility one is given by one's students" (2006: 181).

To Alcoff and Goldberg as well as to Mills, this failure to take the social reality of "race" seriously is not just a matter of benign neglect. It can be positively harmful. As Mills puts it, the colorblind modeling of reality operative in mainstream liberalism is itself nothing short of a distortional, nonrepresentative, and de facto exclusionary "ideology" (2017: 79). To state

[8] See Frigg and Stephan 2020 for an overview of the uses of models in science and the philosophical questions they raise. I thank Elvira Basevich for drawing my attention to Mills's critique of deficient descriptive models and its relevance to liberal Kantianism. See Basevich 2022b, which interrogates Kant's theory of justice through a model that makes salient the political exclusion of people of color and women and their subordination as exploited laborers.

[9] The problem, Mills clarifies, is not the use of abstraction per se, which is necessary to theorizing (2017: 81). He is only rejecting *idealizing* abstractions that look away from social oppressions and thereby hinder the development of the theoretical tools that we need to understand and address them. Mills is thereby building on Onora O'Neill's distinction of "mere abstraction" and "idealization" (1987). For a critique of this distinction, see Schwartzman 2006.

it more bluntly, colorblindness is itself a "hegemonic view," a myth, of the *white* majority (2013: 18).[10] A liberalism that is centrally concerned with *corrective* justice must firmly reject such a myth. It must seek an alternative that shines light on precisely those social realities from which the mainstream model has abstracted away, so that we can see where and how injustices show up (2017: 82–84).

I presume that liberal Kantians today who care about racial justice and racial inclusivity would want to make Kant's philosophy a truly helpful source of insights, conceptual tools, and methodologies in this conversation. If so, it is important to reconsider what prevented Kant himself from calling out the racial oppressions of his time—especially the enslavement of "Negroes"—as egregious injustice. The old narrative that his vision was obscured by his own private (racist) prejudices is too simplistic to capture the complexities of his race thinking. In fact, this narrative itself reflects the modern liberals' failure that Alcoff, Goldberg, and Mills were critiquing: it fails to see that racism is not just a matter of individual prejudices which philosophy, thanks to the force of reason it purportedly epitomizes, can easily overcome or ignore. Its strategy of otherizing the racist Kant in order to save the supposedly unaffected core of his philosophy is convenient but seriously flawed. As I have tried to show throughout this book, Kant's racialist and racist views were by and large products of his exceptionally intricate, systematic *way of philosophizing*. They were not a bug, but a feature, of his overall system.[11]

Nor was it the case that Kant got stuck at such a high level of abstraction—the level of pure practical reason—that he neglected to factor in the complex nonideal realities of *his* time. The exact opposite was the case.[12] Among other things, he took racialized human differences seriously, because *from his standpoint* they were an important part of the historical and geopolitical realities that would affect the realization of the moral vision he articulated for humanity. Far from being colorblind, he developed a rigid racial classificatory system to make the color lines even more visible, more entrenched, and more clearly relevant to practical matters. He knew that the chattel slavery practiced at the West Indian sugar plantations, for instance, was race

[10] On "colorblind society" as a myth, see Brown et al. 2003.

[11] See Huseyinzadegan and Pascoe 2022 for a parallel interpretation of Kant's sexist views, with a penetrating account of its implications for the self-identified Kantians today.

[12] See Huseyinzadegan 2019 on how Kant's understanding of the nonideal features of history, anthropology, and geography inflects his entire political philosophy. Also see Pascoe 2019 and 2022, which bring the problems of race and gender together to construct an intersectional reading of the nonideal Kant.

based and extremely brutal. It is just that he did not see it as an injustice to be addressed urgently, if at all. As I noted in the General Introduction and then explained in Chapter 4, although he might indeed see the trading and enslavement of "Negroes" as immoral when considered in itself (he never clearly said so), it would not concern him unless it threatened to become a politically destabilizing factor.

This approach on Kant's part has ultimately to do with his *normative priority*. As I suggested, he was above all interested in figuring out how or even whether humanity—as a species, not an aggregate of coexisting individuals—could go from its current state of warring antagonism to a perpetually peaceful global order, a precondition of moralization. In this respect, his concern was to answer critics of European civilization such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Kant had to concede this much:

> Under the present conditions of human beings one can say that the happiness of states grows simultaneously with the misery of human beings. And there is still the question whether we would not be happier in a raw state, without all this culture, than we are in our present condition. (Päd, 9: 451)

A Rousseau could use the facts of chattel slavery and destructive colonization as extreme examples of the "misery" brought about by European "culture." In response, Kant would call for a knowing *abstraction* from such facts so as to take a long view of human history, whereby (European) culture appears as a necessary intermediary stage and preparation for a better (moral) future.[13]

Kant outlined the relevant procedure in the "Conflict of Faculties" (1798), where he treats the old question "Is the human race constantly progressing?" as a question about the "moral history" of humanity qua "the totality of human beings united socially on earth and apportioned into peoples (*universorum*)" (SF, 7: 79; see Anth, 7: 320). If the current state of human affairs seems "senseless" to a Rousseau, Kant would recommend a change in "the point of view" after the fashion of the Copernican turn in astronomy (SF, 7: 83).[14] Specifically, he would advise the following: one should see humanity "not as [a sum of] individuals (for that would yield an interminable enumeration and computation)"—of course, one would see miseries everywhere if one did that!—"but rather as divided into *nations and states*" (7: 84, emphasis

[13] On Kant's account of culture as an intermediary stage of human history, see Marwah 2012.

[14] Kant's Copernican turn in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Bxvi–xvii) is common knowledge. Not so well known is the Copernican turn in his philosophy of history (Booth 1983).

added).[15] Thus, even if one sees racial slavery, for example, as immoral at the micro level of individuals, one may *choose to look away* from it by switching one's viewpoint to the macro level of nations and states. This deliberate act of looking away, as I explained in Chapter 5, is the defining feature of Kantian abstraction.

In other words, Kant made what Mills calls a political philosopher's "methodological decision" (2017: 77) as he attempted to model realities in a way that would align with his normative priority. A descriptive modeling is deficient only relative to a given normative priority. If so, it is hard to say that Kant's modeling of the eighteenth-century world was obviously mistaken from *his viewpoint* with respect to *his normative priority*, which was the continued progress of humanity as a species. This orientation toward humanity's *species-bound* progress—coupled with his view of lasting peace as a precondition of moralization (the final end of human progress)—led him to describe the historically contingent realities of his day in terms of relations between major powers.

This interpretation of Kant's thinking implies a crucial lesson for today's liberal Kantians who are committed to substantial racial justice, equality, and inclusion: the work must begin with yet another *Copernican turn*, this time to make *corrective* justice the new normative priority (just as Mills urged).[16] The basic Kantian procedure still applies here: know your normative priority, choose a suitable viewpoint, and model social and political realities accordingly. This fits with Kant's account of the kind of "political prudence" that

[15] I stress "nations and states" partly as a reminder of the normative relevance of geography to Kant. It gave him the realistic world knowledge (*Weltkenntnis*) he needed to think through the mechanics of human progress. Specifically, it allowed him to figure out which peoples had or lacked the wherewithal, including political institutions, to advance toward humanity's destiny as participatory agents. As I noted in Chapter 1, around the time (the first half of the 1770s) Kant started developing a scientific theory of race, he was also moving the topic of European peoples from his geography lectures to the newly established course on anthropology (Stark 2011a: 78–79). And it must be a calculated decision when he focused on just a handful of Western-European nations (France, England, Spain, Italy, and Germany) in his final account of the character of nations in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798).

[16] Lorraine Code uses the idea of "Kant's Copernican revolution"—the epistemic revolution presented in the first *Critique*—to describe a new revolution in philosophy as a whole. This new revolution is "ecological thinking," which "redirects the focus of epistemic analyses toward situated knowledges, situated ethico-politics." It thereby *decenters* the way of thinking that has dominated philosophy and refuses to operate with the "hyperbolic" ideals that have been "tacitly derived solely, if imperceptibly, from the white, affluent, western, male experiences" (2006: 198). This call for ecological thinking, in turn, has a critical implication for how we should approach Kant's philosophy today: we should *begin* by localizing and parochializing it, uncovering the ways in which all of its tools were developed in response to the specific problems confronting Europe at the time; only then can we ask whether or how to use any of those tools for, say, feminist projects (Huseyinzadegan and Pascoe 2021).

firmly aligns with morality but at the same time "does not consider it demeaning to draw instruction for its maxims from the way of the world" (ZeF, 8: 371).[17]

What the Copernican reorientation requires of today's liberal Kantians is not as simple as declaring corrective justice our normative priority. Special cognitive and meta-cognitive efforts must follow this declaration, including possibly radical adjustments of one's conceptual apparatus and framing perspectives. I will highlight two adjustments that Mills has recommended, which also resonate with my interpretation of Kant's relation to racism in this book.[18] The first adjustment has to do with *social ontology*. To the extent that one needs an adequate descriptive modeling of nonideal realities in a de facto ill-ordered society, one has to move away from the ontology of "colorless atomic individuals" (Mills 2017: 40). Individuals must appear in the nonideal modeling as "raced humans interacting with each other in racialized ways, with implications both for their own psychology and for broader cognitive and affective societal patterns" (2017: 208). My Chapter 5 illustrated the inescapability of this kind of interactions, some of which can involve extremely high stakes, in a racialized world.

The second, related adjustment concerns *epistemology*. When I explained the subtitle of this book ("views from somewhere") in the General Introduction, I objected to the "view from nowhere" conception of objectivity. I suspect that many academic philosophers assume this view-from-nowhere posture, when in fact what they do—for example, which philosophical issue they single out as important and how they study it—always comes from a standpoint that is shaped by their histories, social locations, identities, and so on. The failure to acknowledge this fact or consider its impact on how

[17] Kant talks about prudence in different contexts. In the *Groundwork*, he talks about prudence (along with skill) as a hypothetical or "problematic" (as opposed to categorical or unconditionally commanding) imperative (GMS, 4: 414–19; see KpV, 5: 36–37). In his "First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*," though, he revises his account and explains why it is better to call skill and prudence "technical imperatives" (EEKU, 20: 200n; see KU, 5: 172–73, 431–32). For a helpful discussion of this revision, see Papish 2018, which includes a critical review of other interpretations. Not so well known is Kant's account of "political prudence" in the Appendix to "Toward Perpetual Peace" (ZeF, 8: 370–86), where he introduces the notion of "a *moral politician*, that is, one who takes the principles of political prudence in such a way that they can coexist with morals" (8: 372; see 8: 377–78). This account is full of potentially useful conceptual resources—for example, a perceptive distinction between "despotizing moralists" and "moralizing politicians" (8: 373)—that we can use to navigate the messy political discourse around race today. For starters, see the discussion in Nelson 2004.

[18] See Huseyinzadegan 2022, according to which Mills's own "Black Radical Kantianism" (2018) represents a "methodological re-orientation" for Kant scholars and Kantian political philosophers today.

one philosophizes can result in a distorted or inadequate modeling of the realities one tries to capture. This, according to Mills, partly answers his rhetorical question "Why should anyone think that abstaining from theorizing about oppression and its consequences is the best way to bring about an end to oppression?" The problem, Mills submits, is that professional philosophy is "hugely *over-represented*" by middle- to upper-class white men. Their theorizing reflects their "social privilege and resulting differential experience." As a result, "a non-representative phenomenological life-world [is] (mis)taken for the world." This result is in turn reinforced by "professional norms of what counts as respectable and high-prestige philosophy" (2017: 79).[19]

It takes social epistemology, especially *standpoint theory*, to shine light on this situation and at the same time indicate strategies to correct it. According to this theory, "certain realities tend to be more visible from the perspective of the subordinated than the privileged." Unsurprisingly, then, "the crucial conceptual innovation necessary to map nonideal realities" has mostly come from historically marginalized groups (Mills 2017: 83). This observation suggests that, for the purpose of an adequate empirical modeling of social and political realities, what is required is a *view-from-everywhere* approach.[20] In particular, the work must involve "countervailing group interest[s] that would motivate dissatisfaction with dominant paradigms and a resulting search for better alternatives" (2017: 79).

To be clear, just because a philosopher represents, as a matter of fact, one of the so far unrepresented or underrepresented group interests, it does not follow that they will recognize it as relevant, or know how to conceptualize it, or have their voice heard and taken seriously by the dominant groups. If one has a certain epistemic advantage by virtue of occupying particular social positions, including the position of powerlessness, the knowledge that is accessible from such a location is not automatically given, but must be *achieved* through self-aware strivings. And such epistemic achievements, including the conceptual innovations Mills was talking about, must be justly interpreted and equitably recognized in the relevant community of theorists (Toole 2019). What this calls for is nothing short of a radical reform of professional philosophy itself—if not from a sense of justice, then at least to

[19] See Dotson 2012 on how old professional norms have served the exclusionary gate-keeping role that Mills is alluding to and the reform that is needed to make academic philosophy more inclusive.

[20] I thank Brianna Toole for making this suggestion while speaking about standpoint epistemology to one of my classes in the fall of 2021.

catch up with an increasingly diverse world (Dotson 2012). Given what I said in Chapter 6 about the role that Kant and Kantianism played in shaping the dominant curriculum of philosophy, Kantians and Kant scholars today have an ineluctable responsibility to be part of the reform. This responsibility is even greater for those who occupy positions of power within academia.

## C.2.2. Students as Situated Meaning Makers: The Work of a Liberal Kantian Educator

Within the individualistic paradigm, an intuitive way of recruiting Kant to address the ongoing problem of racism is using resources from his moral theory—broadly construed to include moral psychology and theory of moral deliberation—to combat racist personal attitudes. For all my reservations about the individualistic approach as a way of interpreting Kant's relation to racism, I am open-minded about the value of using his moral theory to confront racist attitudes, insofar as these are part and parcel of racism. The question is *how* to use Kant's moral theory for this purpose well, without inadvertently making things worse.

To tease out some of my misgivings in this respect, let me begin with the following suggestion by Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill.

> [Kant's] moral theory can serve as a reasonable framework for addressing contemporary racial problems, provided it is suitably supplemented with realistic awareness of the facts about racism and purged from association with certain false empirical beliefs and inessential derivative theses. (2001: 449)

One Kantian recommendation, on this reading, is that "we need reasonable deliberation and dialogue to address racial problems." The recommendation comes with the following proviso:

> such use of reason must be informed by an adequate understanding of the empirical facts about racism, its genesis, its stubbornness, its hiding-places, its interplay with other factors, and the most effective means to combat it. . . . reasonable moral deliberation must direct us to discover and use the most effective permissible means to combat racist attitudes. (2001: 467; see 451)

This suggestion invites hard questions. For example, what constitutes a "racist attitude," to whom can it be ascribed, and at whom must it be directed?[21] And how are we to "discover" racist attitudes? Do we check for them in ourselves through introspection? Or are we expected to find them in other people by, say, looking at their manifest behaviors? Suppose we do both. Then we have to be aware of the fact that, as I explained in Chapter 6, we are all susceptible to the twin biases of "fundamental attribution error" and "bias blind spot": we tend to overemphasize internalist explanations of what other people do while downplaying situational factors, and we tend to see ourselves as less biased than others, presumably due to the epistemic asymmetry in how we assess ourselves (through introspection) versus others (by observing what they do). Accordingly, if we make combatting racist attitudes our priority, we run the risk of seeing such attitudes mostly in *others* and thereby losing sight of the fact that we are all complicit, in one way or another, in racism as a structural problem regardless of what we believe our own attitudes to be. Finally, what are we to do with the discoveries of racist attitudes either in ourselves or in others? What are the morally appropriate affective responses in each case? Are we going to judge these as personal moral failings? If so, how do we avoid moral grandstanding when the judgments are directed at others?[22]

Kant's philosophy indeed contains some conceptual resources for thinking through if not clearly answering such questions. For instance, we may use his "opacity thesis"—a combination of our tendency toward self-deception and inability to know our underlying intentions—to reflect on what it may take to pursue honest moral self-knowledge in a racialized society (Ware 2021: 133–55; Allais 2016).[23] We may borrow his language to talk about what we can *reasonably hope* in trying to lead an ethical life in a world that seems to be full of internal and external obstacles (Cureton 2018), including historically inherited and entrenched racist structures. We may bring his conceptions of shame and contempt (Thomason 2013) to bear on the question about

[21] To see why this question matters, suppose a member of a marginalized race in the United States has been so socialized that she has internalized the assumption about her race's inferiority. She therefore feels ashamed of her appearance, for instance, and acts as though she, or anyone else from her designated race, does not deserve prestige. Should we call this attitude "racist"? If yes, are we to treat it on a par with the racist attitudes held by members of the dominant white race?

[22] On moral grandstanding, see Tosi and Warmke 2020. This is one of my major worries about the individualistic approach to racism, which also tends to be moralistic (as I explained in Chapter 2).

[23] For a Kantian account of moral self-knowledge coupled with moral assessment of others, see Stohr 2022: 98–126. Considering self-directed and other-directed moral assessments *together* is important in cases that involve racism, given what I said about our susceptibility to the twin biases of "fundamental attribution error" and "bias blind spot."

morally appropriate affective responses to the perceived racist attitudes in oneself or in others. And I am sure there are many other examples.

We must be extremely cautious and thoughtful in this kind of discourse, though, particularly if it takes place in a classroom. What we need is not just "an adequate understanding of the empirical facts about racism," as Hill and Boxill recommended. And our ultimate goal should not just be a merely negative task of combatting racist attitudes. Rather, we should invest in the *transformative* work of empowering students—as socially embedded meaning-making and change-making agents—to collectively (re)imagine and strive toward a better future. This is because we in the West teach and learn within what Goldberg calls a "racist culture." This culture goes far beyond personal attitudes. It encompasses all sorts of "cultural expressions and objects," from popular culture to architecture to various institutional norms and practices.[24] These all "embed meanings and values that . . . constitute a way of life." Social subjects jointly make and sustain the culture in which they find themselves, regardless of whether they recognize that it is also a "culture of racialized exclusion." Racist culture, Goldberg notes, "has been one of the central ways modern social subjects make sense of and express themselves about the world they inhabit and invent." As such, it at the same time contains "the conditions of possibility for resisting and responding to it" (1993: 8–9). That is, we can take ownership of it, so as to transform it.

An important part of the transformative work, as it pertains to us qua scholars-cum-educators, consists in conceptual disruptions and innovations. Mills was calling for this when he urged for a more adequate descriptive modeling of today's social realities. The conceptual tools and framing devices created by the historically dominant group—white, male, Christian, straight, and financially secure (as well as able-bodied)—can make marginalized groups feel powerless, by rendering their lived experiences invisible or unintelligible. For dominant concepts, such as the concepts of the self and of humans in general, will often "obscure certain crucial realities" while "concepts necessary for accurately mapping these realities will be absent" (Mills 2017: 83). To this I add that, as academics trained in a largely insular profession that has long been controlled by straight and able-bodied white men, most of us may have acquired the habit of philosophizing in *their* terms and from *their* perspective. This is so regardless of one's gender, race, or other

[24] See Fu 2022 for a study of the racist origins and legacies of architectural designs, which can enforce racial boundaries symbolically as well as physically.

kinds of identity. It takes consciousness-raising to register this fact as something worth noting, to scrutinize what one has taken for granted, and to explore new concepts (or update the old ones) for a richer and more realistic understanding of the society in which one is embedded. Only then can one meaningfully teach "to transgress" and thereby make one's educational practice a transformative "practice of freedom" (hooks 1994).[25]

With this point, let me return to Kant. As I have emphasized throughout this book, he was a lifelong educator who saw his teaching as a *world-making* practice.[26] He understood his audiences in terms of their social locations and historical destinies (as far as he could tell), which were in turn determined by their race (white) and gender (male). He knew, though not exactly in these terms, that his pedagogical space was also a space for *intersubjective meaning making* and knowledge production. The linguistic norms that regulate these processes include the norms of pragmatics as well as those of semantics. Mills emphasizes this point when he suggests that the norms of conversational implicature (a form of pragmatic inference), in particular, "determine the inclusivity or exclusivity of reference" in the minds of Kant's students and such norms may well "track racial membership" (2014: 145).

A parallel point can be made about our classroom today (I am focusing on the situation in the United States). If Goldberg was right about how "racist culture" permeates our society, then different students can feel included or excluded—through tacit applications of pragmatic norms—by what a professor does or says, including curriculum designs, conceptual choices, textual interpretations, and so on. The students' differential responses in this respect may well depend on their respective social locations, as determined by their race among other identities. In all likelihood, these occur beneath the level of conscious awareness, which does not make them less impactful. To help transform a racist culture, then, one must begin with critical reflections on the *power* one has in one's classroom—a microsocial space with its own complex structure and culture—and on the pragmatic norms that can affect the meaning-making processes in this space.

[25] Two other books from bell hooks's Teaching Trilogy are also worth mentioning here. One of them focuses on the transformative power of critical thinking (2010). The other extends learning from the classroom to everyday spaces and integrates the tasks of ending racism and community building (2003).

[26] I attribute this characterization to Jameliah Shorter-Bourhanou, who used 'worldmaking' to describe Kant's teaching career in a presentation at the virtual session hosted by the North American Kant Society on May 19, 2021, *Kant and Race: (How) Should We Teach Kant's Views on This Topic?*

I have suggested two examples in this book that can illustrate this point. One example concerns the impact of syllabus design. It comes from Chapter 6, where I explained how Kant's intervention in the eighteenth-century debate about the origin of philosophy helped to shape the overtly Western-Eurocentric curriculum of "history of philosophy" that has prevailed in higher education to this day. Most of us probably know nothing about Kant's involvement or the racist aspect of his argument for the once fringe and controversial view that true philosophy originated with the Greeks. And no professor would want students from marginalized groups to feel excluded. But professorial intention is not the point here. A curriculum of *the* history of philosophy that includes only Western philosophical traditions will have subtle but profound effects on students, especially those who are racialized as people of color. This is where one of such students may start or, rather, continue to internalize the presumed inferiority of their minoritized culture.[27]

My second example is about how to bring some of Kant's philosophical ideas into a critical *dialogue* with the lived experiences of students, especially those who are in marginalized social locations due to their perceived racial among other identities. When I talked about Kant's account of abstraction in Chapter 5, I mentioned that he spoke harshly of individuals who in his view failed to ignore or abstract away from certain features about themselves when they should, making them not only unhappy but also foolish and useless in society. His advice was that one should just be at ease with oneself, feeling confident that one's behavior will not be judged unfavorably by others. This advice may be well taken in an ideal society. But one would be both clueless and unkind to recommend it indiscriminately to everyone in a society where white supremacist and patriarchal (among other inegalitarian) assumptions still rule the day—in terms of social and political practices and arrangements if not conscious beliefs on the part of particular individuals. Instead, if one were to talk about Kant's view of the relation between abstraction and

[27] I am speaking from my own experience. I used to dismiss Chinese philosophy as "not philosophical enough" and would get offended if anyone suggested that I should pursue it (now it is my favorite class to teach, partly because it is so appreciated by students from all sorts of background). Ironically, this misguided attitude started when I was studying philosophy in China with Chinese-born but American-educated professors, who treated analytic philosophy as *the* hardcore stuff that truly intelligent people would do. This impression hardened during the years of my doctoral study in the United States. None of my professors signaled any serious interest in non-Western philosophical traditions.

happiness in a class, for instance, one should invite students to think critically and authentically about it in connection with *their* lived experiences.

The same point can be extended to many other examples. If one teaches Kant's view on anger, for instance, maybe one can put it in dialogue with the side that defends uses of anger in the fight against racial (among other forms of) injustice. As Audre Lorde puts it, "focused with precision [anger] can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change," where change means "a basic and radical alteration in all those assumptions underlining our lives" (1981: 8). Myisha Cherry (2021) calls this kind of anger "Lordean rage," which differs from other kinds of anger and can serve antiracist purposes. In arguing for this position, Cherry puts Aristotle in conversation with Lorde. What happens if we do the same with Kant?[28]

Similarly, if one teaches Kant's view on contempt, what about putting it in conversation with Macalester Bell's argument that "apt contempt" can have moral value and that, in particular, the best response to a racist's inapt contempt is apt counter-contempt (2013: 137–226)?[29] And if one teaches Kant's view on the duty and processes of self-knowledge (Ware 2009; Kraus 2020), the discussion can certainly be enriched if one pairs it with W. E. B. Du Bois's account of double consciousness (as I already suggested in Chapter 5).[30] Finally, if one teaches Kant's view on public use of reason (O'Neill 1986), one may interrogate it vis-à-vis the rich literature on testimonial and hermeneutical among other forms of epistemic injustice so often committed against nonwhites and other marginalized groups (Fricker 2007; see Anderson 2012; Toole 2019).[31]

Whether or how one decides to place Kant's work in such dialogues in the classroom, it is important to keep an open mind and be cognizant that one will inevitably have blind spots due to the confines of one's own social

[28] For interpretations of Kant's view on anger among other morally relevant emotions, particularly as it compares with the Aristotelian approach, see Sherman 2011; Borges 2019 (especially 105–24).

[29] I thank Karen Stohr for drawing my attention to the topic of racist contempt. For her own take on this topic, see Stohr 2022: 145–56.

[30] See Basevich 2022a, which uses Du Bois's theory of double consciousness to reveal the limitations of the Kantian model of self-respect.

[31] Interpretations of Kant's theory of testimony often uncritically connect it with his notion of public use of reason. I offer an alternative reading in my paper on Kant's use of travel reports as a form of testimony (Lu-Adler 2022a). The paper ends with a note about his appeal to an anti-abolitionist's testimony about the behaviors of freed former slaves. This raises the question as to what, if anything, his philosophy can offer to address testimonial among other forms of epistemic injustice. To compound this question, it is also worth noting that, in Kant's view, only the Occidental whites have the *linguistic wherewithal*—a discursive (as opposed to merely pictorial) language—to effectuate public use of reason as epistemic and moral agents (Lu-Adler 2023).

location. The "view from everywhere" approach that I mentioned earlier is key to the kind of dialogues I am suggesting. It is vital to create a space, a community of sorts, for students to participate in such dialogues as agents who have a stake in the future but who must first reckon with what Alcoff calls "the intense present reality of race" (2006: 179).

And I have written this book precisely with a view to understanding some of the historical forces behind "how race is [still] lived, in its multiple manifestations"—so that we can prudently entertain the "possibility of its eventual transformation" (Alcoff 2006: 179). I have done so by clarifying Kant's role in the formation of modern racist ideology (Chapters 1–4), an ideology that has permeated Western societies and global orders to this day, and by illustrating the effects of race concepts on (self-)perceptions and social interactions (Chapter 5) and even on academic philosophers' collective imagination of what "philosophy" and its "history" can be (Chapter 6). Many will find my account controversial. But, to let the always perceptive Charles Mills have the last word,

> the important thing is obviously to get the debate going, so that discussion of these issues in an increasingly nonwhite United States can move from the margins to the mainstream. Facing up to the historically white-supremacist character of the society and the polity will be an important conceptual move in facilitating this debate, and philosophy, committed by its disciplinary pretensions to both Truth (getting it right) and Justice (making it right), can and should play an important role in bringing about this paradigm shift, even if—or rather especially since—it has been culpably absent so far. (2017: 135)

# Acknowledgments

I started to take interest in Kant's views on race in 2019. Between then and now, countless people have inspired, encouraged, and in some cases corrected me with their words and deeds. This book would not have been what it is now—or might not have happened—without them. I will mention as many of them as I can recollect. It will also give me an opportunity to share the journey of personal as well as intellectual growth I experienced while working on this book.

It all began with the American Philosophical Association's Central Division meeting in March 2019 (Denver). I attended a session on "Prejudice in Philosophy." The main speakers were Charles Mills and Robert Bernasconi, with Lucy Allais as the commentator. They together put Kant's racist views in the spotlight, albeit from different angles. It was, although it should not have been, the first time I paid attention to this part of Kant's philosophy. I could not help but want to dig deeper and figure things out myself.

The first opportunity to do so came when, later in 2019, David Bronstein and Peter Anstey invited me to contribute a chapter to an anthology on definition and essence from Aristotle to Kant. I decided to interrogate the common assertion that Kant held "racial essentialism," by looking at his own notion of "essence" against the background of the Locke-Leibniz controversy on whether or how classifications track essences.

I presented a draft of the resulting paper, "Classification, Essence, and Race—A Study of Kant's Racial Classification," at the DC-Baltimore Kant Group meeting in December that year. It was a local work-in-progress workshop. I received valuable feedback from the other participants at the meeting (Mavis Biss, Alexander Englert, Tim Jankowiak, Laura Papish, Lydia Patton, Michael Rohlf, and Matthew Stolte). More important, that was also the first time I entertained the idea of writing a book on Kant, race, and racism. The enthusiastic affirmation I received from those fellow Kantians, as well as their confidence in my ability to carry out the project well, definitively put the plan on my calendar.

I subsequently wrote another three papers to explore different aspects of Kant's raciology. The feedback I received on each one of them would

influence how I wrote various parts of the book. The first such paper is on Kant's account of "savages," especially his claim that they are "lazy." I presented a version of the paper, "Kant on Laziness—Another Look at Race in His Philosophy," at the TEMPO (Traveling Early Modern Philosophy Organization) conference in June 2020 (online), organized by Richard Fry. I had follow-up conversations with some of the attendees not only about Kant's raciology but also about other relevant parts of early modern philosophy. The most important thing I learned from these conversations was the fact that, long before Kant, seventeenth-century natural philosophers like Robert Boyle were already interested in the cause of black skin and at the same time confronted with the need to defend monogenism (the view that all humans, for all their differences, belong to the same species) on scientific (as opposed to biblical) grounds. I learned this from Dwight Lewis's presentation, "Robert Boyle's Rejection of Human Difference." It prompted me to do further research on Boyle's position (I was already interested in his account of scientific methodology for other reasons). This would influence how I wrote Chapter 4, where I presented Kant's raciology as part of a larger system of racial knowledge production that began with natural philosophers like Boyle and, before him, Francis Bacon.

I submitted an expanded version of the paper on laziness, "Kant on Lazy Savagery, Racialized," to the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. I am grateful to the editor of the journal, Deborah Boyle, for securing two timely and penetrating reviews and to the reviewers themselves for obviously putting a lot of thoughts into those reviews. The reviews played a formative role in how I came to frame this book. One of the reviewers pressed me to clarify my take on Charles Mills's view that Kant's moral claims, which are prima facie universalist, in truth have a restricted scope of application (whites only) and that we get this reading once we take into account his racism. Mills's reading is controversial. The need to take a clear stand about the controversy led me to step back and question the very assumption underlying all sides of the controversy, according to which Kant's racist claims directly contradict his pure moral claims (if read literally). I now reject that assumption, as you can see in Chapter 1.

Meanwhile, the other reviewer of the "Lazy Savagery" paper drew my attention to the fact that Kant, in the 1760s, was simultaneously reflecting on the phenomenon of organic (re)productions in his writings on natural philosophy, reflections that paved the way for his race essays, *and* making racist claims in the "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,"

which officially marked his Rousseauian turn to value theoretical knowledge only in view of its contribution to humanity. So, while Kant would approach the topic of "race" primarily from the standpoint of a philosophical investigator of nature or *Naturforscher* in three dedicated essays, he would never lose sight of the practical relevance of the theoretical findings presented in those essays. This recognition of the ultimate entanglement of the theoretical and the practical informed my approach in Chapters 3 and 4.

The next paper that I wrote was "Kant's Use of Travel Reports in Theorizing about Race—A Case Study of How Testimony Features in Natural Philosophy." This paper grew out of exchanges with Thomas Sturm in July 2020. Thomas invited me to present at the conference on "Kantian Rationality in Philosophy of Science." When I decided to talk about how Kant used travel reports—a paradigmatic example of "testimony" according to him—in his writings on "race," Thomas drew my attention to the post-Floyd German debate about Kant's racism that I mentioned in the General Introduction to this book. This information turned out to be really valuable, since the debate raised a lot of important questions that I would address in the book. One question was whether Kant, in holding racist views, was simply "Ein Kind seiner Zeit" (as Marcus Willaschek put it). Looking at Kant's treatment of testimony, which was for him a form of (merely descriptive) historical knowledge, helped me to see why the answer must be yes *and* no. Part of the key lies in Kant's own distinction between historical and philosophical knowledge: the main contribution of his raciology was to add theoretical heft and a normative upshot to the already biased travel reports about extra-Europeans and thereby weave folk prejudices into systematic, scientific-sounding, and philosophically significant racial knowledge. This observation in turn pushed me past the individualistic or atomistic approach that was prevalent in the German debate and indeed in the entire discourse on Kant and racism.

The final paper I wrote while working on the book was "Kant and Slavery—Or Why He Never Became a Racial Egalitarian." Although much of the paper was already part of Chapter 4, I was inspired to turn it into a journal article by Jordan Pascoe's work on Kant's theory of labor. Jordan presented her work at the Pariah Workshop (convened by Elvira Basevich and Helga Varden) in August 2021. As she connected Kant's theory of labor and his views on slavery, I felt the urge to confront the popular narrative that he belatedly condemned race-based chattel slavery (he did not). As I was isolated in California and could not access all the books, Jordan generously emailed me scanned images of some of the texts that I needed to build my case.

I submitted the article to the *Critical Philosophy of Race*. I am grateful to Robert Bernasconi, the editor, for quickly securing two helpful reviews and for accommodating the extraordinary length of the article. I am also grateful to Christoph Hanisch, Macarena Marey, and Zach Vereb, who gave me the opportunity to present a version of the paper at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Kantian Standing Group in April 2022. Lucy Allais kindly agreed to comment on the presentation and even offered additional comments on the side. Her thought-provoking comments as well as the questions and remarks from the audience prompted me to revise and improve on the most controversial parts of the paper. Pauline Kleingeld, whose interpretation was my main target and who could not attend the presentation, graciously offered her thoughts in writing. These also helped me to improve on the paper, improvements that were in turn incorporated into the book.

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The two editors from Oxford University Press (New York) who worked with me, Lucy Randall and Lauralee Yeary, were enthusiastic about the manuscript and procured timely reviews. I am grateful to the two reviewers, both of whom gave a resounding recommendation of the book's publication "as is," for their exceptionally thoughtful comments. Although neither of them asked for revisions, I still took their comments into account as I continued to make improvements on the manuscript.

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